Touched by suicide

With the exception of the USA, there have been relatively few books focusing specifically on bereavement by suicide, so these titles are a welcome addition to the literature and, apart from the new edition of Ross's *After Suicide*, they have all been published in the 21st century. Although their style and general approach to the subject varies, there is something here for everybody – those bereaved by suicide, bereavement counsellors, and professionals whose work touches on suicide and its impact on others.

COPING WITH SUICIDE

Maggie Helen

London: Sheldon Press, 2002, 113pp. £6.99 pb ISBN 0 85969 871 8



Maggie Helen, a counsellor and childhood survivor of her mother's suicide, has written a self-help guide which is intended to complement professional advice but would be an equally valuable resource for anyone offering help and guidance to those bereaved by suicide. Advice and information are interspersed with personal accounts. At just over 100 pages, and reasonably priced, this is an affordable and accessible book. Summary points at the end of each chapter could be useful for anyone wanting to dip into a topic as well as reminding readers of points already made. I liked her chapter on different survivors which not only discusses the impact of the suicide of family members, including parents, children, or spouses, but has welcome additions, namely: gay and lesbian survivors, the suicide of a friend, and the impact of suicide on members of the caring professions. In her final chapter, 'Shaping the future', Maggie Helen reminds survivors and those supporting them that there is indeed a future; her Action Plan grid (p110) could be used by survivors as well as by bereavement counsellors with their clients. The author adopts what could be described as an approach of 'benevolent firmness', reminding survivors that although the person who took their own life chose to do so, they can choose to move forward. Self-help guides are enjoying something of a vogue at the moment, judging by the quantities lining the shelves in bookshops. Maggie Helen's book is a welcome addition, offering as the blurb says 'a glimmer of hope for the future' while managing to be both realistic and supportive.

A VOICE FOR THOSE BEREAVED BY SUICIDE

Sarah McCarthy

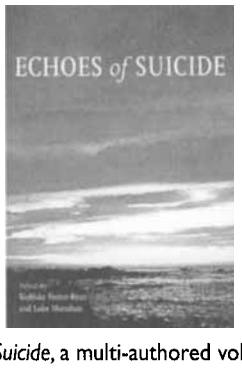
Dublin, Ireland: Veritas Publishing, 2001, 104pp. £7.99 pb. ISBN 1 853 90593 3

Sixteen years after her husband's suicide, and with four children under ten, Sarah McCarthy has written a personal account of her subsequent journey of recovery. This is likely to be of particular interest to those bereaved by the suicide of a spouse or partner and faced with raising children single-handedly. The longest chapter, 'My survival struggle', which alphabetically lists the author's thoughts, feelings, behaviours and physical symptoms, interspersed with bullet points, is a helpful guide to what is often experienced as jumbled and confused. Survivors will be able to identify with many of these reactions and counsellors and other caring professionals will find the information useful too. This is, on the whole, an optimistic book, although I do have one or two reservations. Some readers may find it difficult to identify with the author's frequent references to God and Jesus (clearly important to the author) if they themselves are of other faiths or none. There is a helpful chapter on children's grief, but the author's four children are referred as 'the eldest boy' and 'this girl', for example. Presumably this is to protect their identity but it seems to imply a need for secrecy and for avoidance of stigma?

ECHOES OF SUICIDE

Siobhan Foster-Ryan, Luke Monahan (eds)

Dublin, Ireland: Veritas Publishing, 2001, 317pp. £15.74 pb. ISBN 1 85390 504 6



Echoes of Suicide, a multi-authored volume, stems from a conference on Youth and Suicide held in Dublin in October 2000. With over 30 contributors, a certain unevenness and some repetition between chapters is inevitable. The Introduction lists eight separate aims for this book and a 'pick and choose' approach will be necessary. Some chapters will be of interest to researchers, for example, and others to those working with schools; a series of personal stories may be helpful to survivors. Sharing the same publisher as Sarah McCarthy, this volume has a strong religious (that is, Roman Catholic) flavour which may appeal to some but not others. Suicide was only decriminalised in the Irish Republic in 1993, so hopefully both these books will lead to greater public acceptance and understanding.

AFTER SUICIDE

A Ray of Hope for those Left Behind

Eleanora Betsy Ross

Cambridge, MA, USA: Perseus Publishing, 2001, 307pp. $16.00 pb. ISBN 0 73820 596 6

After Suicide is an expanded and updated version of a book which first appeared in the United States nearly twenty years ago, written by a survivor who is something of a pioneer in the field of suicide bereavement. Eleanora Betsy Ross wrote the first edition following her husband's suicide, and went on to found Ray of Hope, a national self-help organisation offering support, education and consultation in the areas of suicide, loss and grief. Nearly half this volume comprises the author's autobiography so readers may wish to 'fast forward' to other chapters. As with *Echoes of Suicide*, a selective approach is likely to be most helpful. Chapter 4, 'Helping yourself survive', takes a firm but gently tough approach, tackling difficult issues such as survivors' guilt and anger and offering useful suggestions for self-help and coping strategies. In Chapters 12 and 13, Ross does not shrink from addressing the difficult area of the pre-existing dysfunctionality of some families in which suicide deaths can occur. Chapters 5 and 11 on supporting survivors and running support groups provide a valuable resource for anyone involved in setting up groups or other kinds of support. The booklist at the end would have benefited by including publication dates to indicate more up-to-date resources, and this reviewer was particularly irritated to find her name misspelt (appearing as Weitkheimer).

These four books are diverse, but all have something to offer those whose lives are touched by suicide. BC

Alison Wertheimer

Counsellor, Supervisor and Trainer

Ideas about death, pictures of heaven

A STORY FOR HIPPO

Simon Puttock, Alison Bartlett

London: Egmont Children's Books, 2001, 32pp. £4.99 pb. ISBN 0 74974 022 1

A delightfully told and illustrated tale of a friendship between an old, wise Hippo and a young, frisky Monkey in which Hippo prepares Monkey for his death and Chameleon helps Monkey with his grief afterwards. Hippo gives a new meaning to the phrase 'and they lived happily ever after'. This book is a very useful addition to the literature for pre-school and infant school children to help them understand that all creatures die when they get old, what grief feels like and that it can get better. As Hippo says, 'Nobody knows how to live forever, not even a wise old hippo'. Children bereaved by the death of an elderly grandparent would find it helpful.

GOODBYE MOG

Judith Kerr

London: Harper & Collins, 2002, 32pp. £9.99 hb. ISBN 0 00714 968 9

Kerr has decided to kill off this cat, the subject of many favourite stories for children. I don't like the way she has done it – since Mog is present as a ghost who talks even though the children can't hear her. A substitute for her appears – a kitten acquired by the children's mother but it is frightened of everything and Mog's ghost says, 'It's the wrong sort of kitten...it's very stupid'. Ghostly Mog decides to teach the kitten how to behave (the kitten can see her) and succeeds. After the children, delighted with the more approachable kitten, say they will, nevertheless, always remember Mog, she 'flies up and up and up right into the sun'. What would a bereaved child make of the possibility that their lost parent or sibling exists as a ghost, and might be burned by flying into the sun? I think this book raises more problems than it solves and cannot be recommended for bereaved children, although some parents might like to use it for Mog-lovers as a way of introducing the subject of old age and death.

EVIE AND THE MAN WHO HELPED GOD

Michael Foreman

London: Andersen Press, 2003, 32pp. £10.99 hb. ISBN 1 84270 219 X

Evie helps the gardener, George, who tells her that he doesn't make gardens, God does. 'I just help.' One day he doesn't come and mother tells Evie that George has gone to help God all the time now. Evie takes over and does the planting-out job on the lilies She dreamily admires the sights and sounds of the garden as she and George used to. That's it! The illustrations are lovely and the book would certainly spark off questions for parents to answer if they were reading it to a pre-school child. It is too subtle and obtuse for a child to be left to read on her own and would not do for an atheist or agnostic family.

UP IN HEAVEN

Emma Chichester Clark

London: Andersen Press, 2003, 32pp. £9.99 hb. ISBN 1 84270 046 4

Little Arthur's dog, Daisy, is getting old and tired. One day she wakes up in heaven which is lovely and rejuvenating – the author waxes lyrical about how wonderful heaven is – but Arthur is sad and questions his parents about why Daisy died. They do not, in my opinion, do a very good job of explaining, saying merely that she was very, very old. (We don't hear what Arthur makes of this. What about his parents, are they getting old too, will they die?)

Daisy consults her heavenly friends to find a way of helping Arthur with his mourning. 'Send him dreams', they say, and she sends dreams of how nice heaven is. This is not enough so eventually Daisy sends a dream of a pup and Arthur, having received, so to speak, permission from Daisy, feels better and asks his parents to act on the dream and buy a new puppy for him. Again, lovely illustrations, and it might help a child who has lost a pet to accept a replacement.

I think opportunities are missed in this book, and in some of the others I have mentioned above, to help young children understand more about the elements of the concept of death – that it happens to everyone, that there is a cause, that dead people and animals are different from live ones in a number of respects



Cartoon reprinted by permission of PFD and Posy Simmonds. © as printed in the original volume

(they cannot see, hear, feel, move etc). They also, I feel, cop out on the real question children want to have answered – what happens afterwards. More and more, I become convinced that heaven was invented by adults to avoid having to tell children about corporeal decomposition. As one child asked me, 'How far is heaven? Why can't mummy come back for tea if she has gone to heaven? When she went to Manchester, she was back in loads of time'. The children in all three books reviewed here which use heaven as a cop-out don't seem to have the sense to ask these important questions. BC

Dora Black
Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editors

As a bereavement counsellor/trainer and a second generation Hindu who has lived in London all my life, I would like to comment on Shirley Firth's article, 'Changing Hindu attitudes to cremation in the UK' *(Bereavement Care* 2003; [2]**22**: 25-28).

Though Hindus in the UK do still have issues about the difficulties of following their religion here, particularly the older generation, most people I know have accepted that it is necessary to adapt our practices – along with so much else – since moving here from Africa or the Indian subcontinent.

For instance, traditionally, women would not participate in the funeral but increasingly they do, particularly when there is no suitable male relative available. I was asked to speak at my step-brother's funeral last year. In the past, very young children had to be buried, but are now often cremated. Scattering ashes in rivers other than the Ganges is still a big compromise but in London riverboats can be hired particularly for this purpose.

Specialist Hindu funeral directors here can now arrange cremations within three days, sometimes even sooner. It can even be arranged for the congregation to watch the coffin burn. If the family does not want to wash and dress the body, the Hindu parlour can do it (the British equivalent may not perform the ceremony correctly). Hindu funeral services are preferred, particularly by older people, because of their better understanding of our culture and languages.

As Hindu families now move all over the world and form mixed relationships and friendships, the younger generation is absorbing new ideas. For many of us, the opportunity to change old rituals, create new ones or set up new services to fit in with the local practices and culture, has even been welcomed.

ANJULA SHARMA
22 Heathlands Way, Hounslow
Middlesex TW4 5BU, UK

The Compassionate Friends (Bristol, UK)

David Lloyd-Hughes
Publications Co-ordinator

The Compassionate Friends (TCF) offers support and friendship for bereaved parents and their families, by those similarly bereaved. It was founded in the late 1960s in Coventry, UK, by a young hospital chaplain barely out of training college, who was faced with trying to comfort two pairs of grieving parents, in a short space of time. The Revd Simon Stephens thought of what now seems to be such an obvious solution – he introduced the couples to each other. This was a gamble because all bereaved people react differently in grief and they could have resented what they may have seen as an intrusion on their personal world. Fortunately for all who have benefited since, this was not so; all four became the best of friends and (the three remaining) are now TCF's 'founding parents'.

Other grieving parents soon joined the original couples – a hospital chaplain has contact with numerous bereaved families – and they gradually evolved into a group which met to talk and help each other through the pain and distress that all bereaved parents have to face. The idea spread throughout the UK and small, informal groups began to meet regularly, welcoming newcomers to their meetings.

In the meantime, Simon's career took a sharp change of direction: he joined the navy, as chaplain aboard *HMS Ark Royal*. Behind this move, he had an another intention – to use his travelling facility to good effect by encouraging the setting up of new groups in the places he visited. As more and more families found they could support and encourage one another, TCF expanded and there are now groups in over 20 countries, with a particularly strong following in the USA, Australasia and South Africa. Each country operates independently, but there are international 'gatherings' every few years at which all countries are made welcome. The next will be in Vancouver in July 2005. The web is particularly useful for keeping member countries in contact with each other and there are a number of TCF websites worldwide (for a review of the UK and USA sites see *Bereavement Care* 2002, **21**(3): 45).

Throughout the UK, over 170 people act as official contacts, both locally and countywide, putting bereaved parents in touch with one another. The contacts are trained and they, or a bereaved parent, run monthly meetings usually held in private homes over tea and biscuits. Here, bereaved parents, especially the new ones, can talk to others and share their fears ('Am I going mad?' is so often heard) with those who can say, 'I know how you feel'. The contacts also have good working relationships with other bereavement agencies such as Cruse Bereavement Care.

The national helpline is often the first point of contact for bereaved parents, providing support and information on their local groups. It is listed in most phone books and publicised to doctors, social services, funeral directors and the police.

Throughout the year, retreats are held at which small groups of parents come together for a quiet time away from the outside world. Annual gatherings are held in Scotland and England for all UK members; newcomers usually come with some trepidation about what to expect and are surprised at the friendly and welcoming atmosphere. All are encouraged to participate or not, as suits their needs, in the events and discussion workshops. The keynote speaker at the 2003 gathering was William Roache MBE, who plays the part of Ken Barlow in the UK soap *Coronation Street*, a fellow bereaved parent.

TCF produces and prints a selection of leaflets dealing with specific aspects of bereavement: death by suicide and homicide, death abroad and a father's grief, to name a few of the 32 currently in print. Last year 50,000 of these leaflets were distributed. For those with a greater reading appetite, there is a postal library, stocking over 1,200 titles, plus audio and video tapes. This is believed to be the most comprehensive library of its kind in the UK and is available to bereaved parents and those who have a professional interest in bereavement. Numerous articles on different bereavement-related topics by TCF members or professionals are also available. Every quarter, a magazine, *Compassion*, is published, written and produced entirely by members.

TCF does not claim to counsel or cure its bereaved parents. It seeks only to provide them with friends who may be able to understand the depth of grief they are suffering.

Contact TCF in the UK at 53 North Street, Bristol BS3 1EN; ☎ 0117 966 5202. National helpline 0117 953 9639; website www.tcf.org.uk Library contact: Catharine Pointer, 77 Rectory Lane North, Leybourne, West Malling, Kent ME19 5HD, or *via* the website. BC

How should schools respond to death?

GRIEF IN SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

Louise Rowling

Buckingham, UK: Open University Press, 2003, 196pp. £17.99 pb. ISBN 0 33521 115 1

Wherever you turn at present, writers in the bereavement field are producing information for teachers. Awareness of the needs of bereaved children has extended beyond the limits of the child and family to include the institution where children spend at least six hours every day. Unfortunately much of this literature, particularly that written in the USA, does not transfer well to settings outside the country of origin, but Lousie Rowling's extensive qualitative research, in both the UK and Australia, gives this book a wide relevance for professionals in many countries.

Dr Rowling has a background in education, and her empathy and appreciation for education professionals come through clearly in the many quotes that illustrate her book. I was impressed by the depth and thoroughness of her research, which included interviews with educationalists from all backgrounds and with a variety of teaching experience. She looks at death and loss as experiences within a social context, interpreted through personal interactions, and argues persuasively that death education should form part of a school's social learning curriculum: the supportive environment schools can create should be part of the wider mental health promotion framework.

Starting with theory, the book takes us through all aspects of loss as it impacts on children, teachers, and school communities. The management of critical incidents, special cases such as death by suicide, and the possibility of disenfranchised grief of both pupils and teachers, are all considered. Rowling looks at the role of the head teacher, exploring the particular issues for those who are expected to be in charge, partnerships with other agencies, and ways to place education about grief and loss within the curriculum, with comments from young people. Finally, she discusses the way forward for education and training. Each chapter ends with a few helpful, practical bullet points on implications for practice.

The strength of this book is that it provides both a theoretical underpinning and sensible, practical and workable suggestions for creating supportive school communities. It would be a most welcome addition to the library of anyone working with bereaved young people.

Frances Kraus

St Christopher's Candle Project Leader

WHAT WILL WE DO? Preparing a School Community to Cope with Crisis (2nd edn)

***Robert Stevenson** (ed)*

New York: Baywood Publishing Company, 2002, 242pp. $48.95. ISBN 1 84310 015 0

This book is written for all who are interested in how schools can cope with crises and minimise their effect on the school community. In recent years there has been increased concern about the safety of children in school and a number of traumatic events involving children and staff both on and off the school premises. It is urgent, therefore that every school should consider how it would respond to different kinds of crises.

The book describers pre- and post-intervention programmes in the USA which deal with issues relating to loss, illness, death, grief, war and violence. One chapter describes practical steps that need to be taken by a school to help it prepare for a possible future crisis. Other very useful chapters cover youth suicide, AIDS and HIV infection ('a continuing crisis'), community support groups, encouraging peer support, and creating a 'safe room' in the school nurse's office. Rick Ritter, in chapter 14, describes how critical incident stress debriefing teams give support to schools in the USA and raises very important questions about how schools in the UK can establish reliable networks of professional help and support as part of their crisis planning.

This book is timely and highly recommended reading for all head teachers and others involved in preparing schools for possible future crisis management.

Susan Askew

Course Leader in Health Education

RESPONDING TO PUPIL BEREAVEMENT

Lesley Ratcliffe

Ainsdale, Merseyside PR8 2TD, UK: Positive Behaviour Management, 2001, 32pp. £7.99 pb.

This short, easily-read publication gives clear advice to teachers about how to help children after a bereavement. There is a discussion of 'normal grieving', and of the changes in behaviour that may be seen. The importance of age and developmental level are considered. The characteristics of a good listener are outlined, as are some of the obstacles to good listening and effective communication. The author points out that access to specialised counselling support may not be an immediate

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editors

As a coroner in a rural area of England which has substantially changed its coroner service recently, I hope I can correct the impression given by Parkes' editorial in the Summer issue (*Bereavement Care* 2003; [2]**22**: 18) that the criticisms of the coroner service outlined there are universal practice. I appreciate that in other areas circumstances may well be different.

Our service is now run by the local authority with all coroner's officers, administrative staff and archive facilities under one roof, centrally placed in the region. Bereaved relatives find this a considerable improvement on the previous *ad hoc* arrangements with local courts and other facilities.

Families are almost invariably consulted by us over post-mortem decisions. Where there is no choice, the reasons are explained. If organs must be retained to establish the cause of death, this is carefully discussed and the family's instructions on what is to happen to the organs subsequently are carried out. If necessary the body is kept until the organs can be reunited with it. We often deal with insurance claims for families and, as a result of our post-mortem or inquest procedures, can sometimes provide essential medical information.

Very rarely are funeral arrangements delayed, usually only where there are possible charges of homicide or disputes amongst family members about funeral arrangements. Police are only involved if there is a reasonable suspicion of an unnatural death. Otherwise any investigation takes place through the coroner's service.

At present, the coroner has a statutory duty, without any discretion, to hold public inquests in certain circumstances, unless issues of national security arise. However, we use documentary evidence instead of witnesses for many of our inquests, and families have access to that evidence and are often invited to come in to review the file and talk to the coroner's officer.

My hope is that in the future coroner's service would be able to provide a full investigative and support service for the bereaved, including facilities for bereavement volunteers. The substantial financial resources this may require would be well spent if it helps support those involved in sudden and unexpected deaths which, as the editorial rightly states, are inevitably going to be traumatic.

EDWARD G THOMAS, HM Coroner
The Old Courthouse, St Albans Road East
Hatfield, Herts AL10 0ES, UK

need post-bereavement and, in many cases, may not be required at all.

GIVING SORROW WORDS (resource pack)

Steven Killick, Stuart Lindeman
Bristol, UK: Lucky Duck Publishing, 1999. Manual 54pp, video 38 mins. £47.00. Manual, pb, ISBN 1 87394 272 9

This resource pack, a manual and accompanying video, stresses the need to give children accurate and truthful information. Children need 'opportunities to remember', and to be able to ask questions. The usefulness of preparing a school policy in advance, and of keeping good records, are discussed. A policy framework and model policy are included in the book, as is advice on dealing with the media, on multi-cultural issues and on religious and spiritual issues.

These two publications complement one another, and provide useful advice for teachers and schools – provided that they are read and do not simply sit on a shelf in the head teacher's study.

Martin Newman
Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist

A TEACHER'S HAND-BOOK OF DEATH

Maggie Jackson, Jim Colwell
London: Jessica Kingsley, 2001, 176pp. £13.95 pb. ISBN 1 84310 015 0

A Teacher's Handbook of Death is presented as a contribution to open talk with children about death. The authors identify a gap in the literature relating to teaching about how and why death occurs, rather than helping children who are bereaved and feeling grief. They argue that children from the age of eight upwards should be given basic information about death and dying, including how we die, dying and cancer, dying and AIDS, preservation of bodies, how the body is prepared for burial and cremation, among other topics. They suggest that this information is important for children in order to help them make more sense of death and recognise it as an everyday occurrence, part of all our lives.

While these objectives are welcome, I was left with serious concerns about how useful and appropriate the book is as a 'handbook' for teachers. The level of information is confusing. While the book is written for teachers, it is suggested that much of the information should form part of a 'death education' curriculum for children. Complex issues relating to teacher training, including the opportunity for teachers to talk through their own issues relating to death, are not considered. Any school that is contemplating embarking on adding these topics to the curriculum would need to involve parents and community leaders. Sensitivity to those who may have been recently bereaved would be paramount and the context within which discussion about death arose would need very careful consideration. Issues relating to emotion, context, teacher education and community consultation are all noticeably absent. BC

Susan Askew
Course Leader in Health Education

BOOK

THE CUE FOR PASSION Grief and its Political Uses

Gail Holst-Warhaft
Cambridge, MA, USA: Harvard University Press, 2000, 228pp. £28.50 hb. ISBN 0 67400 224 5

Listening to Earl Spencer at the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales, showed me how revolutions can happen: had she died in an earlier century, and had Spencer ended his speech with the call to throw out the Windsors, millions might have responded. The power of grief can engender political change – that is the thesis of this well-written and highly original book.

The standard line in the sociology of grief is that, through funeral and other rites, mourners gather together and affirm the solidarity of the group over and against death. Holst-Warhaft, however, shows how the passion of grief can be the cue not for stabilising society but for transforming it. Moving easily from ancient Greek literature to the Vietnam war and Princess Diana, this is an enormously hopeful and energising book. Grief is probably the most powerful emotion that humans feel, carrying us to the edge of madness; in many societies, it was indulged, performed, shaped into song and lament. But many authority figures in church and state feared it, banning song, laments and wakes, and making mourning a dull business. They turned the energy of grief into depression.

But this book gives examples of how mourners (acting together, rather in the isolation into which modernity usually thrusts them) have been powered by their grief to challenge authority. The most dramatic example is the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, the mothers of Argentina's disappeared, who refused to be bought off with (probably fake) bones being returned to them and with talk of the need for 'closure'. As their newspaper wrote: 'Let there be no healing of wounds. Let them remain open. Because if the wounds still bleed, there will be no forgetting and our strength will continue to grow.' Only thus is a corrupt government changed.

It is easy to worry about mourners who make a career out of campaigning, seeing such prolonged grief as unhealthy for the individual. This book, by contrast, shows that loss-driven campaigns form a tradition that is millennia old and may be vital for the health of society.

Tony Walter
Reader in Sociology

CONFERENCE

A Special Scar. 18 February 2004. Bereavement, Loss and Training Support, 8th annual conference. Northwood, Middlesex, UK Keynote speaker, Alison Wertheimer. Apply to BLTS ☎ 020 8930 7375; bits.bits@ntlworld.com

ABSTRACTS

Does hospice care reduce the mortality following bereavement?

Christakis NA, Iwashyna TJ. *Social Science and Medicine* 2003; **57**: 465-473

Several studies, which are referenced in this paper, have demonstrated an increased risk of mortality, most often from heart disease, among widowers and widows following spousal bereavement. In this large-scale study the authors followed up the spouses of people who had died of cancer in the USA. Using information from Medicare files they were able to match the spouses of 24,721 cancer patients who had died under the care of a hospice with the same number who had died under other care. The matching criteria included age, sex, diagnosis, duration of illness, and financial status. Both groups were followed up for 18 months after their bereavement in the course of which 4.9% of the widows of hospice users had died compared with 5.4% of the other widows. Similarly, 13.2% of the widowers of women dying in a hospice were now dead compared with 13.7% of those who died elsewhere. These differences are significantly in favour of the hospice use. In widows 'hospice use by their husbands reduced their short-term odds of death to 0.92'. This difference is greater in magnitude than the benefit obtained from beta-blocking drugs and similar to the benefits of improving diet and exercise risk factors.

In the USA most 'hospice' care is provided in the home and includes some form of bereavement support. It is not clear whether the care, which appears to have reduced the mortality rate in the 'hospice' bereaved group, resulted from the help given to the patient or to the family before and/or after bereavement.

Colin Murray Parkes

Soldiers and students: lessons in coping with loss and grief

Stevenson RG. *Illness, Crisis and Loss* 2003: 11(3); 242-257

With the bombing of the World Trade Center, terrorist violence reached a new level. The author of this article is a member of the New York Guard, a teacher, and a counsellor who was closely involved in the aftermath of September 11, helping both students and the military to cope with their shock and grief, and with the loss which some of them had experienced through the death of loved ones. Dr Stevenson describes the varying ways in which teenagers and soldiers tried to address their fear, helplessness, anger, loneliness and guilt, and discusses how these emotions, if not properly resolved, can lead to violence. The lessons learned from the response and the recovery of those involved can, he believes, benefit educators and parents as well as the general public.

Sibling support systems in childhood after a parent dies

Hurd RC. *Omega* 2002: **45**(4); 299-320

The research question addressed was: to what extent did the interactions of childhood sibling subsystems after a parent died help healthy grieving in families where the surviving parent was emotionally unavailable to the children? The researcher studied two quartets of middle-aged sisters who, when 3-10 years old, had experienced the deaths of their fathers and the emotional absence of their mothers. The results included a variety of interactions that demonstrated the potential for siblings to contribute to each other's healthy grieving, although the stable presence of a supportive adult was important. Helping professionals should be encouraged to nurture sibling subsystems by teaching and coaching children how to help each other's grief in ways appropriate to their age. They should also avoid focusing too closely on the pain of the emotionally unavailable surviving parent to the neglect of the children's individual needs and care-giving capacities. As the author points out, a limitation of this study is the reliance on self-reports about experiences from 30-40 years earlier.