

(p.4)

Date of Meeting:	17 July 2002
Venue:	Committee Room 2, National Assembly for Wales
Title:	Access to Bereavement Counselling

## Purpose

1. A paper for the Committee to note on Access to Bereavement Counselling.

## Background

1. In Committee on 17 April 2002, when discussing the Health Promotion Voluntary Grant Scheme section of the Monthly Report of the Minister, the Committee asked for further information on the availability and access to bereavement counselling following the death of an adult or child.

## Current Situation

1. Accessing bereavement services is commonly done via three main referral routes : self-referral, referral by GPs and referral by hospitals/hospices. Bereavement may be sudden and unexpected or anticipated during a last illness. Response to the death of a close relative typically starts with either a delay period or a phase of numbness or denial. This is followed by distress and yearning followed by feelings of depression, apathy and futility. Phases of anger are also not uncommon. These are normal reactions to bereavement and with such grief work must be undertaken to regain normal mental health. This phase is normally supported by the family and friends of the individual, and sometimes by voluntary organisations such as Cruse Bereavement Care Cymru.

2. However in some individuals this process may be prolonged or particularly severe and then referral, normally via the GP to specialist health services may be indicated. Where an adult or child are referred to within the NHS will depend on the symptoms and level of need. If the GP or school believed symptoms such as emotional distress or behavioural disturbance to be severe, a child might be referred to a psychologist, specialist nurse or a child psychiatrist, that is to tier 2 services as discussed in the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Strategy. An adult may sometimes develop a true depressive illness superimposed on their grief and again will be treated according to need whether at primary care level, by the CMHT or as an inpatient. The Adult Mental Health Strategy makes it clear that a range of psychological therapies should be available throughout Wales, and where counselling occurs in whatever setting, appropriate arrangements should be in place for supervision and training.

**3. There are also groups who offer support, information or advice. These include Cruse Bereavement Care, the Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society, the Twins and Multiple Births Association Bereavement Support Group, Contact a Family, Childline, the Child Bereavement Trust, the Foundation for the Study of Infant Death, Support after Murder and Manslaughter, Victim Support, Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide, Help the Aged, Compassionate Friends and the Samaritans. The Welsh Assembly Government does provide some direct grant support for voluntary organisations who provide such services or provide support and assistance as part of a wider remit. These are:-**

- Cruse Bereavement Care Cymru have been allocated under the Adult Mental Health Strategy grant funding of £37,458 and £35,491 for 2002-03 and 2003-04. The grant supports the core costs of the organisation. Their activities include seeking to increase access to counselling services throughout Wales and also to raise awareness of the effects of unsupported grief can have on people. Under the Health Promotion Voluntary Sector Grants Scheme, a grant of £43,000 has been allocated to Cruse for the period 2002-04 for a Bereavement Service Portal Project aimed to increase awareness among health and social service providers to improve access to support in bereavement, thus helping to avert mental ill health and social dysfunction associated with unsupported grief.**
  - The Churches Counselling Services for Wales have been allocated under the Adult Mental Health Strategy grant funding of £22,660 in 2002-03 and £23,340 for 2003-04. The grant supports the core costs of the organisation. Their activities include the provision of high quality counselling to people in order to help them achieve better mental health by resolution of personal and emotional problems.**
  - The Samaritans have been allocated under the Adult Mental Health Strategy grant funding of £16,315 for both 2002-03 and 2003-04. Their activities include improvement of mental health by achieving quality and equity in the delivery of their confidential and emotional support services across Wales to people in crisis and raising awareness of the existence of their organisation.**
  - Contact a Family Wales have been allocated under the carers element of the social care grant scheme for all Wales voluntary organisations grant funding of £28,377 in 2002-03 and £30,050 in 2003-04. Their activities include providing information and support to parents caring for children with any kind of disability or special need or acute or long-term illness.**
- 4. Cruse Bereavement Care Cymru is perhaps the largest bereavement organisation operating in Wales. They have a strong volunteer base (around 400 volunteers) and have 11 branches covering all parts of Wales. Cruse's counselling and/or support services are available to both adults and children and families. These can either be in the form of one-to-one or group work. Counselling sessions are usually of an hour's duration and the average length of their counselling is 12/13 sessions. The waiting time for their counselling services varies across the country from 1-2 weeks to a month or longer. This can be affected by**

circumstances such as the time of year e.g. the number of counsellors available in the summer months can reduce due to holidays. Overall, Cruse consider that bereavement support services in Wales are patchy and diverse in nature, ranging from no availability to some well established counselling services which embrace both direct emotional support and an administrative function.

5. Other advice on practical matters following bereavement is available from a number of other sources. These include :
- The Department of Social Services – who have produced a publication on what to do after a death which includes information on Social Fund Funeral Payments.
  - The Office of Fair Trading – who have produced information on how to arrange a funeral.
  - The Home Office – who have produced a leaflet giving information on coroners, inquests and post mortems.

**Jane Hutt**  
**Minister for Health and Social Services**

**Contact Point: John Carter, Social Care Policy Division Tel 029 20833095.**