

The All Party Parliamentary Group on Bereavement Support

**Minutes**

Date: 13 June 2018

Location: Portcullis House

Present: Linda Magistris (LM) Robert Stebbings (RS)

 Carolyn Harris MP (CH) (Part) Leva Valatkaite (LV)

 Liz Dempsey (LD) Jenny Ward (JW)

 Fiona Murphy (FM) Carolyn Brice (CB)

 Jan Soulsby (JS) Alison Summers (AS)

 Professor Jennifer Leeming (JL)

 Kim Bird (KB)

 Mohamed Omer (MO)

 Rabbi Daniel Epstein (DE)

Apologies: Paula Abramson Rita Wilkinson

 Rhian Burke Steve Marshall

 Liz Pryor Jane Harris

 Ben Ewart Paul Parsons

All members introduced themselves.

LM gave a brief overview of some of the topics discussed at earlier APPGs including Helen Daykin’s progress in achieving a change in procedure of all schools in Yorkshire; Helen Byrne who currently has an appointment with the Head of Public Health in Wiltshire and Tracey Bleakley’s progress in the study of mental health and bereavement.

Jenny Ward from the Lullaby Trust gave an update on the Child Death Review (CDR) which is currently in its tenth year. The CDR looks at all deaths of children up to the age of 18 and provides a guide for parents. The number of CDR panels are being reduced whereby some will be merging with a view to making them more robust. There are plans to provide every family suffering the death of a child a key support worker who will work with the family from the time of death until the Child Death Review takes place. There is currently no funding for this. There are also plans for a single database to hold information regarding all child deaths so that data can be analysed from all around the country.

CH briefly attending to apologise for her absence due to issues surrounding Brexit.

LM then talked about the Good Grief Trust card that is now in production. The charity currently has 10,000 cards ready to distribute. The four coroner’s hubs in Manchester have received an order along with all hospitals across the Pennine Trust. Cicely Saunders at King’s College London also have taken 1000 cards. LM explained that the cost is currently 50p per card. LM made a request for any suggestions for distributing the cards and would appreciate any feedback. Any APPG members who would like to order the GGT card, please contact us hello@thegoodgrieftrust.org.

Mohamed Omer (MO) from the Gardens of Peace then gave us a brief oversight of grief and bereavement in the Muslim faith. The bereavement period is 3 days which starts at the point of burial. It is understood that, after 3 days, life should continue to be lived as your life is granted by God and is preparation for your time in eternity. MO understands this can be very hard particularly for women losing babies and children. Women are not allowed to attend funerals and often carry the blame for still births so MO has set up the Muslim Bereavement Support Service specifically to help women – all volunteers are trained by Sands/Curse and also have Islamic Training – and encourage women to become involved in funerals.

The need for help external to the faith has come about primarily because women will generally not visit the Iman for support and the support that would have come from large extended families in the past, with families not living in one area nowadays, has reduced. The Islamic community will though often cover the cost of a funeral and children’s funerals are free. It is felt that more people are seeking help from secular organisations as they feel they will not be judged, MO felt that the Gardens of Peace should have links with all charities as it is preferable that help is sought from these organisations rather than seeking medication from a doctor.

There has been an increase recently in young people being murdered particularly in London – funerals where crime is involved can often take months to take place which exacerbates the problems surrounding bereavement. MO also explained that suicide is taboo in Muslim communities and families are often blamed but MO explained that his role is not to judge but to bury respectfully. Islam teaches that Muslims should help their fellow Muslims grieve.

MO pointed out that any policies derived involving death, burial and bereavement should have a faith element as it is such an important part of the Muslim faith.

Rabbi Daniel Epstein then spoke about bereavement in the Jewish Community. Bereavement is considered to be a resilience building event that everyone will experience at some point in their life. There is ritual and structure around a death and burial which is part of the Jewish faith which assists the bereaved in feeling supported. When someone dies, all normal customs and prayers stop and the family focuses on grief. The burial should have happened as soon as possible with as little interference as possible as it is believed that we are made in God’s image and therefore the body is sacrosanct. If a post mortem is required, the family, though the Burial Society, will request for an MRI instead to leave the body intact. If someone dies unlawfully, the perpetrator can currently request a second post mortem which slows down the burial process. Professor Leeming commented that the Chief Coroner is due to issue guidance on second post mortems shortly in Manchester so that they will be the exception and not the rule. Synagogue membership includes membership of a Burial Scheme, which goes towards covering the cost of every funeral which is an incredible support for the family to know that this is taken care of. Non-membership does not preclude burial and either the family pays or the community will support, where financially needed.

After the burial, there is a 7 day process known as “shiva”, whereby family mourners traditionally would not leave home but the community visits them, bringing whatever is required for sustenance with prayers taking place at home instead of at the synagogue.. This structure and ritual helps reinforce the sense of community; everyone knows what is expected over this period and the family feel supported. When you have lost a loved one, you are most at risk of questioning your faith so the mourner is encouraged to lead a special “mourner’s prayer” for the entire community during subsequent months in the synagogue; thereby reaffirming their faith with the help and support of the community. Around a year after the burial, there is a tombstone-setting ceremony which is again another opportunity for the community to support the bereaved.

Both MO and DE agreed that best practices from all faiths and all communities should be brought together and used as a tool for bereavement support.

It was felt that a similar community support was lacking in the secular world and both MO and DE gave an open invitation for their respective working environments to be visited to help people from other faiths or those with no faith to understand these support frameworks better.

LM thanked OM and DE for their very interesting and instructive presentations.

**Date of the next meeting to be confirmed**

****