

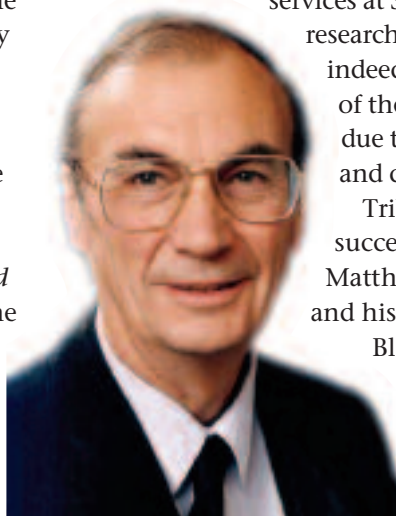
Love and loss: a timely tribute

“ Many people, both within and outside the United Kingdom, will have marked the 40th birthday of St Christopher’s Hospice this year. One such celebration took place at the Royal Society of Medicine in London on 13 July. It was organised by St Christopher’s and took the form of a *Festschrift* for Colin Murray Parkes.

Colin was persuaded to become involved with St Christopher’s by Cicely Saunders in 1966, a year before its opening, and he has remained deeply committed to the hospice and to palliative care ever since. Last year saw the publication of his monograph, *Love and loss. The roots of grief and its complications*.¹ This work is one of the latest of a remarkable catalogue of publications concerning grief, bereavement and its complications and management.

During the *Festschrift* the development of our understanding of grief and bereavement over the last 50 years was reviewed. Colin has been hugely important in our thinking about this subject. He published his first work about grief in 1959 and he was recruited by Bowlby to research the effects and consequences of attachment.

When 144 people, including 116 schoolchildren, were killed by a mudslide in the Welsh mining village of Aberfan in 1966, Colin was part of the team that was sent to help the survivors cope with the grief of such a devastating tragedy. This was to become one of many such difficult tasks that he was to be challenged by. Perhaps the most tragic occasion for which Colin’s particular expertise was called upon was the aftermath of the massacre of almost a million people during the Rwanda genocide of 1994. Colin was very deeply affected by what he saw and made it his business not only to learn the academic lessons but to publicise to the world the horrors that had taken place.



Colin Murray Parkes has given us the understanding of grief and the interventions that can ameliorate its distress

However, perhaps the most valuable legacy – in terms of sheer relief from suffering – that Colin has given us all is the understanding of grief and the interventions that can ameliorate its distress. The nature of attachment within the family and other close relationships is now accepted as the source of our psychological security. During the *Festschrift* it was clear that the evolution of palliative care bereavement services at St Christopher’s, the meticulous research upon which it was based and, indeed, the highly successful growth of the Cruse organisation, were all due to Colin’s energetic involvement and drive.

Tributes were paid by Colin’s successor at St Christopher’s, Matthew Hotopf, by Henk Schut and his Dutch collaborators, by Dora Black, the founding mother of Cruse, and by Sam Klagsbrun, St Christopher’s official visitor since its infancy. The attendees at the *Festschrift* were welcomed by Baroness Ilora Finlay, as the President of the Royal Society of Medicine and by Barbara Monroe, St Christopher’s

Chief Executive. Although Colin stated that he is now retiring at the tender age of 78, few will believe that he will not continue to be extremely influential in his chosen field of bereavement care. It is his observations that have linked the joy of love with the pain of grief, and are telling, poignant and instructive.

For any student of grief and bereavement, the ownership of *Love and loss* will be essential. It reads as the definitive text on the subject written by the father of the discipline.

*The pain of grief is just as much a part of life as the joy of love; it is, perhaps, the price we pay for love, the cost of commitment.*²

Andrew Hoy, Editor

References

1. Parkes CM. *Love and loss. The roots of grief and its complications*. London: Routledge, 2006.
2. Parkes CM. *Bereavement. Studies of grief in adult life*. London: Tavistock Publications, 1972.

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