



Newspapers and magazines will always want to cover stories about death, especially premature death or death in unusual circumstances. This is not a bad thing in itself; it is in the public interest for a community (either national or local) to be informed about the deaths of its members, and it would not be right for the PCC to restrict such stories unduly. But we know through our experience of speaking to those who have been bereaved that dealing with calls and requests for information from journalists following the death of a loved one can be extremely upsetting. Equally, there is often a lack of understanding about the fact that a tragedy may be reported. It is vital that the friends and family of people who have died are told at an early stage that press interest may be forthcoming.

As the behind-the-scenes section (pages 5 and 6) of this report explains, the PCC can offer assistance in various ways to individuals who find themselves caught up in a media story. Although the PCC has always done a considerable amount of proactive work in this area, our efforts have been significantly stepped up in the past year. In part, the recognition that we needed to do more in this area stemmed from our experience of how suicides in and around Bridgend in 2008 were reported, both locally and nationally.

In last year's Annual Review, we set out how we sought to contact many local organisations in South Wales as it became obvious that the deaths were becoming a major news story. However, we subsequently learned from people in the region that there was a general lack of understanding about our powers and availability. It was important that we took this criticism on board, and learned from it.

Primarily, this has involved working more closely with police family liaison officers, since they are often the first point of contact for grieving families. In 2009, we worked with the National Executive Board for Family Liaison to disseminate information to all its members in police forces throughout the country. Following a successful presentation to the Board, several individual police forces (including the

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Metropolitan Police, Derbyshire and Cheshire) requested talks and seminars from PCC staff, which we were pleased to arrange. Feedback from these sessions was positive, with one attendee commenting:

“Just a short note to say thank you very much for your presentation on Monday. I think the PCC is one of those things Officers need to store in the back of their minds ready to use when the need arises. It was useful to hear what you can do for us and I am extremely grateful to you for taking the time to come and talk to us”.

We also worked with the Ministry of Justice, who helped us to contact over 85 organisations specialising in bereavement support. As the government department with responsibility for the work of Coroners, the MoJ last year published an important new “Charter for bereaved people”, which now includes a reference to Clause 5 (Intrusion into grief or shock) of the Editors’ Code of Practice and the services offered by the PCC. We subsequently contacted the Coroners Officers Association to ensure that Coroners’ offices up and down the country have information about the PCC to hand when they are advising any family concerned about media attention.

A number of important new contacts were made in 2009 via the government’s Central Office of Information, which coordinates the activities of regional emergency forums. Each forum has a sub-group that deals with media-related issues at times of emergency and crisis. They include representatives from the police, fire and ambulance services as well as local Councils, all of which are likely to need to know about the PCC should a major incident arise. Our efforts to engage with the UK resilience structure in this way have prompted a good response, and we intend to build on this in 2010.

Other examples of work in the area of bereavement support include: exhibiting at the annual conference of the National Institute of Funeral Directors; arranging for an interview to be broadcast at a conference organised by the charity Cruse; arranging links to the PCC website on relevant external

websites such as Victim Support and the Home Office; and maintaining ongoing contact with Strategic Health Authorities and other NHS bodies.

Our work to promote responsible reporting of suicides has continued in 2009, and we remain in regular contact with both the Samaritans and Papyrus. We were pleased to welcome into the PCC offices a member of Samaritans’ staff, who spent a few days looking first-hand at the kind of complaints we deal with, and the outreach work that we do.

Rachel Kirby-Rider, Director of Fundraising and Communications at Samaritans, said:

“We greatly value the relationship that we have with the Press Complaints Commission in order to aid sensitive and responsible portrayals of suicide and self-harm; lessening the impact on bereaved families and guarding against excessively detailed news reports that could trigger copycat deaths”.

A PCC representative attends every meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Suicide Prevention (chaired by Madeleine Moon MP) in order to listen to any concerns that its members may raise about media reporting. This contact also ensures that MPs with a particular interest in suicide reporting also stay up-to-date with relevant PCC decisions and case law.

We are committed to ensuring that editors and journalists understand PCC decisions as they relate to suicide, and our ongoing series of training sessions with the industry (see page 13) regularly include such cases.



We greatly value the relationship that we have with the Press Complaints Commission in order to aid sensitive and responsible portrayals of suicide and self-harm

Rachel Kirby-Rider,
Director of Fundraising and Communications
Samaritans