



From the Director

Anne Parry
Papyrus
Lodge House
Thompson Park
BURNLEY
BB11 2RU

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tim Toulmin", is written over the typed name of the Director.

Thank you for coming to see me and Stephen Abell the other day, and for leaving us the document scoping out your main concerns.

I am sure that there will be areas where we can work together – and, where we cannot help, we are always happy to explain why that might be the case or where your best port of call would be.

In the first instance, I think it essential that you approach the Editors' Code of Practice Committee for an early meeting, given that they are entirely responsible for the content of the Code (the PCC administers it). I am sure that you will find their Secretary, Ian Beales, responsive to such a request. When announcing the change to the Code of Practice in 2006 to refer to suicide, the then Chairman of the Code Committee said:

“During our annual review, we received convincing evidence, from the Samaritans and others, that media reporting of suicide often prompted copycat cases. It is an international phenomenon. We have attempted to minimise that risk - while maintaining the public's right to know - by emphasising the need for care to avoid excessive detail.”

You might also like to mention to them your suggestion of a specific Guidance Note on the reporting of suicide. I sent you a link to their postal address. Ian Beales's e-mail address is ianbeales@mac.com.

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DIRECTOR
Tim Toulmin



We discussed your concerns about the impact on those who are grieving, and we set out a number of ways we can help. These include:

- Pre-publication assistance in sending ‘private advisories’ making clear that people do not wish to speak to the media at times of inquests and so on;
- Circulating ‘desist notes’ – which can help dissolve media scrums that spring up at people’s houses (these apply to broadcasters as well as the print media);
- Post-publication complaints service dealing with any allegations of inaccuracy in articles, or intrusion into grief or privacy. We negotiate the publication of corrections, apologies and so on, and the destruction or return of information that is regarded to be private. We also work with the editors of the online versions of newspapers and magazines;
- We operate a 24 hour advice line for anyone with any concerns about the behaviour of journalists or press reporting.

Your note sets out some of your frustrations about the PCC based on the last time you complained to us back in 1999. As we outlined, I hope that the PCC is a much different organisation now, and more user-friendly.

The rule on the need to complain within two months of an article being published, for instance, is much more flexible than you might think. For a start, it is for the Commission to decide whether there are good grounds to waive the rule – and a recent bereavement in such shocking circumstances might well provide sufficient grounds in the Commission’s view. It is also the case that, in many circumstances, the Commission will consider material that continues to be published in the online version of the publication – regardless of how long it has been since the original piece was published in the print copy.

Additionally, providing we had authorisation from the people concerned, there would be nothing to stop us considering complaints made through expert support groups such as Papyrus.

Turning to current and future initiatives, you are aware of our activities to help families in Bridgend. Since we met, we have circulated a private note to the media with a number of requests from named families about the use of pictures, information and direct approaches by journalists. We are also investigating a small number of specific complaints under the Code of Practice.



In order to address the broader issue, we are looking into sponsoring an event at the London School of Economics later this year about the reporting of suicide generally. This would bring together the public, journalists, lawyers, and experts in this field from the UK and abroad in a seminar format. This may well involve case studies – as you will recall, we touched on the power of case studies (both good and bad) as an educative tool. I will of course keep you posted about how plans for this proposed event progress.

Finally, you mentioned that you had two new areas of concern: reporting of stories about parents who kill their children, and coverage of suicide in children. Please let me know if you have any further thoughts about these issues.

With kind regards.

Tim Toulmin

Tim Toulmin

