

BOOK REVIEWS

New Journeys Now Begin: Learning on the path of grief and loss

Gordon T.

ISBN 1-905010-08-7

Wild Goose Publications, The Iona Community

This was one book where editorial privilege was unashamedly used, I'd seen a working draft of this book and wanted to read and review the published version myself.

As an overall review this book passes the 'Ronseal' test hands down: *It does exactly what it says on the tin!* In his introduction Tom Gordon sets bereavement theory and professional education in their useful and rightful place then turns to the real people, real stories, and real experiences of bereaved and grieving people trying to come to terms with their loss.

There is a refreshing contrast which aligns the professional chaplain who knows from experience that the theory is real and relevant and bereavement takes time, with the experienced and reflective practitioner who has earthed that theory through the people he's met and journeyed with. Not only is this contrast held together it is accentuated with the skills of a gifted and resourceful creator of prose.

In each of its 14 chapters this book takes the reader on a narrative rich journey through the lived experience of real people. Some of the stories pull at your heart strings, others have you laugh out loud and have you saying to yourself "Yes! That's what it's really like". The finale to each chapter is a rich resource of prose in which the author grasps the essence of the experiences outlined in the chapter and tells it straight and with feeling.

As one example, the 'Rituals and Celebrations' chapter gives real insight into the changing times we live in and the abundant variety of local traditions and ritual. This chapter really hit home in the adaptation of the famous and much requested Henry Scott Holland reading. Like the author many readers will have stood there in front of a grieving assembly reciting the opening words "Death is nothing at all" while inside thinking 'actually death some-

thing: its a big deal for these people'. The author's refreshing adaptation cuts to the chase: "*I'm dead, no longer here to laugh and cry and share with you our precious love*" (p134).

This book is a gem, its earthy, its real, it's a joy to read and it's meant to be much more than a book for professionals who minister in bereavement, yet on that level alone it is a tremendous resource. This book is a must for the bookshelf and I envisage there being more than one copy on my shelf, for at last I've found a book which without reservation I could give with confidence to someone who is bereaved and struggling, someone facing the beginning of a new journey who wants something to read.

David Mitchell, editor.

Coming In: Gays and lesbians reclaiming the spiritual journey.

Mattmann, U

ISBN 1-901557-98-7

Wild Goose Publications

Given the current climate of change regarding civil partnerships and homosexual relationships, it is likely that hospital chaplains and volunteer visitors will be called upon to provide support and understanding to gay patients and their partners. With this in mind, I decided to read Urs Mattmann's book, *Coming In*, so that I could offer help in a constructive way.

Mattmann writes his book from an openly gay perspective. He has been in a partnership for some years, considers himself a Christian, and has spent many years contemplating his own personal faith. Starting in a very orthodox way, he studied theology at Bible College for two years, but has since trained in psychosynthesis, the branch of psychology which includes the spiritual aspect of the human being, and he now conducts retreats and workshops aimed at helping those he refers to in his book as 'queer' to pursue their own spiritual journey to God and the 'Cosmic Christ'.

The book itself is constructed like a 'self-help' guide. The chapters are fairly short, well written, and are subdivided into smaller easily read sections; the layout and writing style making the book appealing to the reader. In addition, each chapter finishes with questions, exercises and prayers aimed at guiding the reader through their personal spiritual journey to acceptance as part of God's family, with further recommended reading and useful addresses to be found at the end of the book.

By and large, I found this an interesting and enjoyable book. The chapter on 'Queer Spirituality' gave a description of spirituality very familiar to me. However, I felt that he 'over-egged' somewhat the place of homosexuality in the evolution of the cosmic plan and the 'special' place homosexuals should hold in society due to their sensitive, caring, and artistic nature. A stance less liberal readers will find hard to swallow. Nevertheless, this would make an excellent resource for chaplains, and those working in the caring professions in general, not just for their own edification, but for recommending to gay people who are struggling to reconcile their 'gayness' with their faith.

Margaret Hodder is currently a post graduate student at the University of Aberdeen and a chaplaincy volunteer visitor at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary.

Social Perspectives in Mental Health: Developing Social Models to Understand and Work with Mental Distress

Tew, J.

ISBN 1- 84310-220 x

Jessica Kingsley Publishers

A well laid out book with good headings and abundant chapter end references. Although based on research in England it is pertinent to Scotland and demonstrates knowledge and compassion. The authors want the views of the mentally ill to be valued in decisions about their treatment and the recognition of society's place in that treatment as opposed to medication. Illness is part of the whole person and whole person should not be defined by illness which is just part of life. The foreword points to social factors both contributing to distress and healing. The sick should not depend on the psychiatrist to make them well; rather they should be empowered towards their own healing through accepting

their mental distress and expecting that same acceptance from others. The impact of mental health on individuals and society continues to detract from personal sense of worth and wellbeing as sufferers endure stigma. The biggest difference to people's lives will not be through medical treatment but by social inclusion.

The authors believe the *social capital*, i.e. the community and the potential it has to offer is vital to healing. Just as 'hurt people hurt people'; so 'well people make well people'. Valuing the social capital of the church, I looked for the role of the church to be noted but there is very little of **spiritual care**. Significantly, however, religious attendance in a 30 years study in USA was associated with improving mental health by giving emotional and practical support and a sense of belonging.

University professors, homosexuals, blacks and women who are themselves users of mental health services appealed for acceptance of illness and difference by the well community for their healing to be effected.

Research clearly shows recovery to be greatly aided by listening helpers – voluntary or staff – who enable sufferers to understand and be involved in their medication. The importance of in-hospital care as the appropriate environment in immediate crisis is accepted but not so when crisis passed. Staff failure to listen or provide useful healing resources and bad discharge procedures with subsequent lack of support for independent living are all indicators of poor recovery. Being in and sustained by the community's acceptance, job opportunities, and social fulfilment sustains healing.

The insights gained by research into the mental health patient's needs and the important contribution of society make this book a good read.

J Stanley Cook, is a retired part time minister continuing as part time hospital chaplain in community mental health team in Hamilton and at Udson hospital, Hamilton.

Life After Darkness

Weild, C.

ISBN 1-85775729-7

Radcliffe

This is a very personal book. Cathy gives an account of her depression which does not leave any doubt about the depth, length or severity of her condition or why the prospect of neurosurgery for mental disorder gave hope when all thoughts of recovery had long since passed. She shares with us her opinions on every facet of depression, even including the necessarily repetitive excerpts from her diary. Thus we learn of her disrupted family life; her repeated suicide attempts, the strains upon her marriage, even her desire to retain her nail-clippers or the bed beside the window. Anyone familiar with psychiatric inpatient facilities will recognise the powerless nature of her situation and the tendency amongst some staff for the desire for orderly well-run wards to come into conflict with the needs of the vulnerable people they are caring for. Cathy gives us her reaction to the mix of personalities, social backgrounds and conditions in the psychiatric inpatient population, and the mix of personalities amongst the staff.

Cathy's truly horrendous symptoms leave her debilitated, exhausted, lacking appetite, apathetic, slowed down, and all this changes her personality significantly. That she was desperate is clear long before the option of neurosurgery was offered to her, and that her desperation became fixed upon the neurosurgery as her only possible source of freedom, besides death itself, is understandable.

It is interesting for chaplains to note how little Cathy tells of her faith, beyond the social support of her church. The hospital chaplain merits one brief entry, spiritual care is not particularly featured in her story. She has more to say about those unwanted ministrations of church-folk than the welcome ones.

The personal nature of this book is its strength, but its subjectivity means that it does not provide evidence for neurosurgery or against it. The academic and medical community must be careful about what conclusions they draw from it. The national statistics remain unclear, such a small number of cases are given neurosurgery and of necessity they must all have reached desperation, as Cathy had, and so have pinned such great emotional and psychological significance upon the operation that success or failure would come at something of a price. The road to

recovery was far from smooth, even if in places it was rapid. That recovery is the justification of the book and its purpose. This is a book with a happy ending, and certainly one worth reading.

Janet Foggie, mental health chaplain, Royal Dundee Liff Hospital, Dundee.

Integrating Spirituality in Health and Social Care: Perspectives and practical approaches.

Greenstreet, W (ed.)

ISBN 1-85775-646-0

Radcliffe

Wendy Greenstreet is Senior Lecturer in Nursing Studies at Canterbury Christ Church University and has long held an interest in the importance of spiritual care in nursing education. Here she brings together her own reflections, as well as specialised contributions from colleagues at Christ Church and elsewhere in Kent, to form a compendium of views across a wide subject area. This is therefore a Kent-produced book – but, from my geographical perspective, none the worse for that!

The first of four sections entitled “Exploring the concept of spirituality” consists of three essays by Wendy herself providing an excellent introduction to the concept of spirituality as it has come to be understood by health and social care professionals. The first offering in the second section which explores more practical issues of “Spiritual care in health and social care settings” is also by Wendy. Again it offers a good introduction to the state of play in contemporary spiritual care. Readers of this journal may find it refreshing to find an understanding of the role of chaplaincy broader than is common in accounts of spiritual care from a nursing perspective:

“..... most health care institutions employ a chaplain, whose remit is one of pastoral care rather than a focused denominational role, who could support those having different religious faiths and offer spiritual guidance. This broader remit may also mean that a chaplain can provide a source of support for the non-religious in discussing wider spiritual issues that are causing concern rather than those of a religious nature” (page 50)

The other articles which make up this work vary in quality and insight. In the section entitled “Religious, philosophical and cultural considerations” Burkhard Scherer's chapter summarising modern

religious studies is interesting in its own right but weak on application. I was fascinated however by Derek Mitchell's treatment of the existentialist philosophies of Sartre and Heidegger, showing the relevance of this approach to spiritual care particularly in palliative care. The final section on "Creative Therapy" is dominated by the anthroposophical theory and practice of the revolutionary Blackthorn GP practice, Maidstone, inspired by the teaching of Rudolf Steiner.

I commend this book wholeheartedly to readers of this journal particularly to those wanting to get a grasp of current debates around spiritual care amongst our health and social care colleagues outside the confines of chaplaincy.

Geoff Walters, Senior Chaplain, Pilgrims Hospices of East Kent, Honorary Tutor in Palliative Care, Kent Institute of Medicine & Health Sciences, University of Kent

Religions, Culture & Healthcare: A Practical Handbook for use in Healthcare Environments

Hollins, S.

ISBN – 10 1 85775 755 6

Radcliffe Publishing Ltd

The author states that this "...handbook is intended to be of practical assistance to healthcare staff in helping them to gain a fuller understanding of the nine world faiths and to be able to apply this knowledge in a variety of circumstances." The faiths which are included are highlighted in detail and the information is readable, understandable and provides practical advice for all healthcare professionals.

Chapter 1 addresses 'Cultural and religious diversity within healthcare' looking at the diversity of society – some insightful thoughts suggesting we are all "cultural beings" and how culture "...informs and shapes us – for better as well as for worse", acknowledging that "...culture is only one element of many that inform and shape our identity. Other elements looked at are spirituality and religion". Healthcare is described as a culture which "...often threatens to dominate and overwhelm the individual patient and their family..." The author suggests that the healthcare institution is not good at listening and along with building an establishment of trust she

suggests a 'mental checklist' of good practice in our care of patients.

Chapter 2 addresses 'Spiritual Care' and covers a variety of questions like, 'what does it mean to be spiritual'? 'What is the place of religion within 'spiritual care'? 'What difference is there between spirituality and religion'? The author suggests this chapter will "...map some of the routes that have been taken so far, and which might be taken, in response to some of these questions..."

The other chapters include details of fourteen world faiths. The back of the book has a helpful section suggesting 'Further Reading', 'Resources', website information and a comprehensive list of the faiths discussed in the book and their organisational and website addresses.

My only criticism is that Spiritualism has been overlooked – a faith or some may say a 'belief system' or religious practice which is becoming very popular. In my experience Spiritualism is something which nursing, allied health care professionals and patients and their families often 'explore' out of curiosity. A chapter on Spiritualism may have helped to inform healthcare professionals at a variety of levels, including Chaplains in their support of patients and families

A good reference book to have on your shelf to dip into when necessary or lend to a colleague but maybe a little large to be described as a 'handbook' for your pocket!

Dawn Allan, Chaplain Marie Curie Hospice, Glasgow

Healthcare and Spirituality

Kliwer S. P. and Saultz J.

ISBN 1-85775-622-3

Radcliffe

The first few pages I flicked through when this book arrived on my desk whetted my appetite, there were cartoons! Don't be fooled though this book is a serious and in-depth read. The publishers precise says it introduces a biopsychosocial model which can integrate spiritual issues in the process of healthcare. In short it's an attempt to realign and blur the boundaries between medicine and religion that historically went their separate ways. The book sug-

gests it's okay and may even be good practice for medics to enter the spiritual domain and engage with their patients.

The chapters lead you through the authors' understanding of the nature of the person, and the influence of cultures through to exploring spirituality, its impact, assessment and interventions and outlining the objectives in integrating spirituality and medicine.

Those who are familiar with spiritual assessment tools will recognise the HOPE and FICA tools which are designed to engage in conversation with patients rather than be tools that are form filling and tick box. In essence this model is also about the conversation and encourages an openness and willingness to engage in meaningful communication and conversation with people to explore their spiritual identity, history and sense of wellbeing.

The book's North American roots mean that the expression and understanding of spirituality is much more focused on religion than many Scots working in healthcare chaplaincy may be comfortable with, but that aside the general message is that the great divide between medicine and spiritual care can be bridged. It is okay and even appropriate and helpful for medics to engage in spiritual conversations and when there is clearly complexity the right course of action is the same as in any medical decision: you refer on to a specialist and in this case a chaplain.

This book is definitely not one for the holiday reading list it is a useful and educational textbook worthy of inclusion in your professional reading list and departmental library.

David Mitchell, editor and lecturer in palliative care.