

Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing – The craft of caring
Second edition
Edited by Phil Barker
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Most books that attempt to offer a concise yet comprehensive account of psychiatric or mental health nursing have needed to be revised recently due to major changes in mental health services, particularly in the area of legislation. Books that are on Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) recommended books lists such as Norman and Ryrie (2004, 2009) have taken the opportunity to not only develop their sections on legislation but also to update statistics and base their explanations on more recent evidence of good practice.

As with the previous incarnation of this book (Barker 2003), Barker has not only captured but significantly led a more human view of caring for people with problems with living. As the editor, he has attracted authors who are experienced in writing but also in leading changes in practice in their areas of special interest. In the past I have enjoyed reading and recommending to students the publications of Trevor Adams (older person care), Philip Burnard (communicating with others), John Cutcliffe (risk), Lyn Gardner and Gary Rolfe (reflection) and others who have written parts of this book. It is good to see them all here in this text, but also there are names that I recognise more from their work in the caring arena rather than as authors, such as Jon Allen. The sections written by those who are not registered mental health nurses, some of whom have experienced for themselves ‘problems of living’ in a way that has been identified by psychiatric diagnosis and treatment, offer wonderful insights. They, too, fulfil government and academic imperatives, in this text, by supporting their explorations with current evidence.

Despite this wide range of authors with differing backgrounds and, I expect, different writing styles if they were sole authors, this text is both cognate and cogent. It has consistency of style, academic rigour (despite acknowledging the limitations of evidence-based practice) and fluency. More importantly, in my opinion, is the underlying acceptance of people as all having intrinsic worth and being worthy of care. This book is person centred; accepting, valuing and offering a consideration of the person’s sense of themselves and what life means to them; their spirituality.

This initial overview of the book may lead the reader to believe that it has limited structure and is idealistic; it is not based in the ‘real’ world. I can assure you this is not the case: the book has a sound structure with ten sections. The reader is guided through a process of understanding of what nursing is about and some underpinning values in section 1. This leads into an explanation of mental health assessment (section 2) and care; in which time and space is given to consider the specific needs of individuals (section 3, 4 and 5). The organisation of care (section 6 and 7) is followed by legal, ethical and moral issues (section 8) and finally a consideration of how mental health care might be developed (section 9) and what might lie ahead given the nursing context (section 10). Within the book there has not been an attempt to shy away from considering more contentious issues within the field, such as intensive care units, secure care, control and restraint

along with medical or physical interventions.

These sections, or sections similar to these, can be found in other texts (Norman and Rylie 2009, Videbeck and Acott 2009, Clarke & Walsh 2009, Thompson & Mathias 2000) presumably aimed at the same market, but this book stands out in three particular ways; the preeminent group of authors, its value base and its global consideration. Whilst the group of authors (and there is a long list of contributors) can only attract customers and readers the value base may be difficult for some students of mental health nursing to assimilate.

Sadly, in my view, many starting to study this area come from a biological technical perspective or what has been labelled in the past the “medical model” of health. Other books available, on the whole, despite considering service user perspectives and psychosocial interventions present this information in a more technical manner, which may appeal to this student group. As an educator, I particularly enjoyed the discussion in this area by Gardner and Rolfe in chapter 75. Whilst I have my preferred stance, already expressed, I believe there are people who will feel supported and helped by those adhering to a more technological approach.

This book, like other successful books for students, encourages reflection and offers some concrete examples with suggested responses. These are not as prescriptive as some books or so nondirective that a student does not have a foundational starting point. What this book offers is clear explanations for suggestions and discussion in everyday language.

As with the first edition of this book, I expect it will quickly take its place on HEI reading lists and I will certainly be recommending it to the students that I work alongside. There is so much more I would like to discuss about this book but in an attempt to be concise I have limited myself to the most significant areas to me, personally. I am sure other readers will find elements of the book that they would find more enlightening or enjoyable.

As an addendum I would like to point out that although I have had the pleasure of working with some of the authors in the past and would be honoured to do so again in the future, I am not related to the editor despite the same surname and, I believe, similarities in value base.

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