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Davis, C. (2009) *Oncology social work practice in the care of breast and ovarian cancer survivors*. York: Nova Science Publishers. 138 pages. ISBN978-1-60692-594-2. Hardcover. US\$100.

Cancer and how to deal with those affected, either directly or by association, with it is a not only a professional concern for many social workers, it can also be a personal concern. As such, the title of this book has appeal and suggests, correctly, that it will be a useful resource. The author introduces her work explaining that it is based on her experience working with cancer patients, her review of the literature and her many research interviews with cancer patients. She includes many of their words to highlight points being made, to introduce new topics and to provide some emotional content into a work that is otherwise rather clinical and unemotional.

The framework is simple and logical and takes the reader from a description of oncology social work (which provides services to address the psychosocial needs of survivors and their families, Davis, 2009, p.1) and a discussion of its place in oncology practice, through the different faces of women's cancers to health care policy in the USA to key aspects of care for cancer patients, issues around psychosocial care, attending to the needs of family and friends and the need to empower those with cancer to advocate for themselves. She completes her work with a discussion of technological advances in cancer treatment and ends by looking at the challenges and opportunities currently facing this field of practice.

Several facets of Davis's work stood out for me as being of likely interest to readers and I cover them below.

In her account of oncology social work, she states that oncology social workers use 'psychosocial assessments, multidisciplinary teamwork, supportive counseling, case management and advocacy', in their work with survivors, families and caregivers (Davis, 2009, p2). There follows an impressive list of the types of work they are involved in such as managing the many crises of the cancer survivor, finding requisite resources, gaining access to treatment and services and providing support during bereavement. The three main theoretical frameworks used by oncology social workers identified are 'Health Related Quality of Life' (HR-QOL), empowerment theory and the strengths perspective. The Quality of Life approach recognises four interconnected dimensions which readers will recognise: physical well-being, psychological and emotional well-being, social well-being and spiritual well-being. Davis suggests that the medical staff tend to focus on the first of these dimensions, leaving the remaining three for social workers to address.

Patient navigators are now employed by many health care providers in the USA. These practitioners may be professional social workers, nurses or lay workers and Davis argues strongly that social workers should claim patient navigation as work to which they are particularly well educated to do. Amongst other things, it involves 'navigating' patients through the vicissitudes of the health care services, working in communities to enhance and develop local community-based services and to enable patients to advocate for themselves, (Davis, 2009, p6).

Having introduced oncology social work and patient navigators, Davis covers the range of women's cancers, and explores some of the key issues faced by different groups of women, such as Hispanic, Pacific Island and ethnic minority women, rural women and women with advanced, metastatic and terminal cancer.

Coverage of practical concerns is introduced by a quotation from one of Davis's research participants who made the point that while she did see a social worker, 'she just wanted to talk about my problems, NOT solve them, so I didn't call her any more' (Davis, 2009, p50). This quote stood out for me as I felt much of the work of the oncology social worker could be similarly perceived by clients. However, there are some useful practical elements in this book, where the author lists model questions to ask in psychosocial assessment, and where she covers a range of issues concerning the impact of a cancer diagnosis on family and friends, and in her description of a simple distress scale based on the pain scales often used to gauge levels of pain on a scale of 1 to 10.

In her chapter on spirituality, Davis emphasises the importance of addressing this dimension in cancer survivors and covers interesting research indicating where it may enhance people's health and emotional resilience. She reflects on spiritual challenges and benefits, and asserts the needs of caregivers as well as survivors.

There are two good chapters at the end, one on the impact on family and friends and the other on advocacy and the need to educate people to be their own advocates. The author completes her coverage of oncology social work with an impassioned plea for social workers to claim for the profession the role of patient navigator, and to face up to challenges from other professions in the health services who, for lack of understanding, do not appreciate the social work contributions.

Finally, there are useful web resources listed at the end of the book, and I have checked some of these out for readers. I particularly recommend the following:

- www.cancercare.org CancerCare is a national nonprofit organisation that provides free, professional support services for anyone affected by cancer.
- www.gildasclub.org Gilda's Club and The Wellness Community unify to provide support to all people affected by cancer.
- www.nccn.org/ The National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN), an alliance of 21 of the world's leading cancer centres.

Overall, this is a useful overview of the oncology field of women's cancers in the USA with some scope for transferable learning in New Zealand. I have to say I am ambivalent about the use of the term 'survivor' even for those in the 'end of life' stage and kept wondering

whether this was optimism or euphemism. The author does not explain her use of this term and from the websites one can see it is gaining popularity. No doubt, readers will have their own take on it. I would recommend this informative and technical book for a hospital library for the use of students and social workers new to oncology practice.

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Currer, C. (2007). *Loss and social work*. Exeter: Learning Matters. ISBN: 9781844450886. 136 pages. Paperback. Approx NZ \$40.

While working with grief and loss are major issues in social work practice there are surprisingly few books specifically dedicated to assisting social workers to meet these challenges effectively. *Loss and Social Work*, a British publication in the 'Transforming Social Work Practice' series, is an attempt to fill that gap. The blurb describes the book as one which introduces and examines theoretical developments in relation to change, loss and grieving, and acknowledges the interdisciplinary context in which social workers often work with these issues.

This is a slim volume of 136 pages and has been written specifically for undergraduate social work students, but with the author's hopes that the content will also be relevant to postgraduates and in-post social workers. The chapter sequence commences by defining key terms and looking broadly at issues of grief, loss and change. Currer then examines the cultural context of grief and loss together with models and theories related to the experience of loss, linking theory with practice and concluding by considering social work responses. The chapters attempt to bridge the personal and the professional tensions by acknowledging that these are powerful issues which can often trigger an emotional response for social workers in their work with individuals and families. Each begins with an outline of its contents relating this to the requisite British occupational standard and, in recognition of the student audience at whom the book is aimed, chapters also contain reflective exercises and summaries to facilitate a more interactive reading experience.

The social work role, practice implications, lessons and therapeutic goals are discussed generally but those looking for a more instrumental approach may find *Loss and Social Work*, frustrating. Since it is a British publication there is, of course, no content specifically directed to Aotearoa New Zealand and despite the inclusion of a chapter on cultural contexts I felt the cross-cultural references were limited. The emphasis on processing and critical reflection is useful for the target audience of students but may give the text an overly introspective feel for other readers.

On the other hand, I thought the theoretical coverage to be excellent with the inclusion of the older stage models as well as newer additions from Stroebe, Neimeyer and others. Also interesting is the content focusing on the re-development of older models with the tension between varying theoretical emphases nicely represented on page 73 as the difference between 'letting go and holding on'. The material on different forms of loss including disenfranchised loss, ambivalent loss, non finite loss and good and bad deaths was useful and I found the content on the social regulation of grieving very thought provoking.

On balance I am happy to have this book in my bookshelf and I would include it as a recommended text for students. It is a worthwhile and interesting text for those readers and, while I might not buy it for myself if I were a practitioner, a departmental copy could be a useful reference source.

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Bland, R., Renouf, N., & Tullgren, A. (2009). *Social work practice in mental health: An introduction*. NSW, Australia: Allen & Unwin. Practice in Society series. Series editor: Jan Fook, University of Southampton. ISBN 978 1 74175 703. 265 pages. Paperback.

As the third publication in the Practice in Society series which is designed to showcase writing about innovative approaches to social and community social work, this book provides a comprehensive and extensive understanding of the mental health social work landscape. As it also encompasses a pervasive theme of co-authoring with consumers, this book orientates the reader to knowledge and skills valued in person-centred practice. Consumer narratives provide vivid illustrations of family involvement, receiving a diagnosis, risk and danger, change of case manager, archaeology of assessment and the narrative of a grieving father to name but a few.

As 'an introduction' to mental health practice the contents of this book are expansive as the authors have divided the book into 'the context for practice' and the knowledge and skills required for practice. Notwithstanding the difficulty in attempting to enlist all variables associated with context, part one orientates the reader to understanding the challenges of social work in mental health, the importance of 'lived experience', key concepts of consistent themes that influence mental health social work practice plus the policies and legalities that impact on service delivery. Chapter five also provides an overview of five of the most common mental disorders that social workers will encounter in their work, and describes the typical treatments employed. Part two expands the horizon of skill acquisition and embraces the expansiveness of assessment for social work practice, the importance of case management, the primordial significance of working with families and communities, and the associated tensions. The book concludes by acknowledging the further challenge for mental health workers in promoting creativity, learning and change in organisations is via leadership.

Although the frame-of-reference is Australian policy and law, the authors have included international perspectives and have drawn on New Zealand, UK and US experiences that are reflective of emerging developments in mental health in recent years; the importance of the lived experience of mental illness and the importance of relationships as a basis for change. The authors have illustrated with a range of case examples (case studies, resource promotion, projects, prevention programmes, community programmes and primary care interventions) the challenging tensions that mental health workers face in their practice. Consequently, this book consistently encourages social workers to value the power of relationships they make with consumers and with families, and to see those relationships as the vehicle of change.

This book was an enjoyable read; informative, inspiring and also validating of the enormous challenges and immense rewards associated with the profession. The authors have produced a carefully constructed text that is suitable for all social workers irrespective of their experience or practice context. I would strongly recommend this book to all social workers who are either fearful of working with people who experience a mental illness or those practitioners who are contemplating a change in practice setting. *Social work practice in mental health* is a refreshing account of the enormous changes which have occurred in the mental health social work arena and provides a further challenge to our profession to establish effective partnerships with a focus on the social context and social consequences of mental illness and social justice.

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