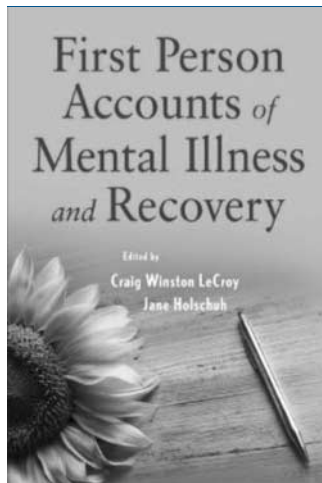


Book reviews

Edited by Allan Beveridge, Femi Oyeboode
and Rosalind Ramsay



First Person Accounts of Mental Illness and Recovery

Edited by Craig Winston LeCroy
& Jane Holschuh.
Wiley, 2012.
£33.99 (pb). 516 pp.
ISBN: 9780470444528

I can still remember the first time I heard a patient talk about what it felt like to be ill. I was 19 and in my second year of pre-clinical training. It was educational and humbling, informative in ways that he would probably not have imagined possible (I knew really very little about healthcare or, in fact, illness). Hearing his experience of his relationship with his doctor brought, for a moment, the reality of what my chosen career might entail sharply into focus; something clicked.

Years later, I am still surprised at how few first-person accounts are used in postgraduate medical education. One might argue that they are unnecessary given that trainee psychiatrists encounter such stories aplenty in their day-to-day clinical work. Or that popular culture bombards us with just these sorts of first-person accounts of mental illness, or that postgraduate training has enough to incorporate as it is. That, however, would miss the mark, and this book is a salient reminder of the importance of first-person narratives within psychiatric training.

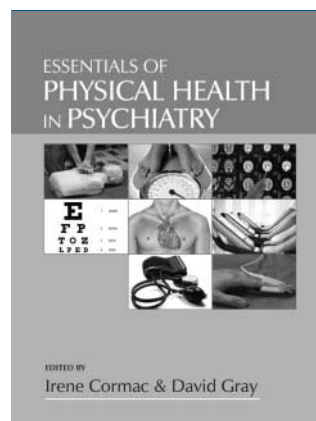
The first-person narrative stands in a very different relation to the clinician than either patient history or 'pop-memoir'. It is an entity quite apart from a patient's history or chronological collection of symptoms and invites us to learn uniquely as neither responsible clinician nor proxy-narrator. It acts to deepen our understanding of the experience of having a mental illness, appreciate what recovery might mean and the multiplicity of means through which it may be achieved. There is no doubt that first-person narratives are also a strong argument against stigma. Much of this is exemplified by the recovery model, which is now well-established as a central philosophy within mental healthcare delivery.

First Person Accounts of Mental Illness and Recovery is a collection of 60 such narratives, arranged around the DSM-IV and covering mental disorders from schizophrenia to dissociative and sleep disorders. The accounts are wonderfully heterogeneous and widely applicable, although, on occasion, feel rather too

American for the British market. Many accounts stand out but worth mentioning are: the psychiatrist who developed schizophrenia, the love letter to whisky from a recovering alcoholic and Tolstoy's beautiful 1887 account of his own depressive illness. This is a book which provides new perspectives on common experience.

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Essentials of Physical Health in Psychiatry

Edited by Irene Cormac
& David Gray.
RCPsych Publications, 2012.
£35.00 (pb). 496pp.
ISBN: 9781908020406

The frightening figures on premature mortality in schizophrenia have jolted government into action. The Royal College of Psychiatrists' commitments on parity of esteem are inspiring and give great hope for the future. But how does the psychiatrist of today put their grand aspirations into practice? Many of us will have trained at a time when in some centres psychiatrists didn't touch their patients, instead calling upon medical colleagues to sort out the most trivial of ailments. The ability to challenge diagnostic overshadowing rapidly atrophied – but it is time for psychiatrists to be seen as 'real doctors' again and it is our job to make sure our patients get the physical healthcare they are entitled to.

But some rapid revision is called for – you have to have the right lingo to advocate credibly! This book will give us confidence that we have an up-to-date handle on physical health, and just as importantly gives an idea of standards of clinical practice we should expect. Cormac & Gray's book explains the problem at a big-picture level – then each chapter covers a topic in detail.

The book is divided into four sections. The first describes professional roles, addresses reversible lifestyle choices, details the general and neurological examination and has a particularly useful chapter on the legal aspects of physical care. The next section gives detailed updates on assessment and management of relevant conditions. The third, on psychiatric specialties, would be great for induction of new starters. The final part, on medical emergencies and injuries, would be handy to have beside you on call.