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Steve McCarthy-Grunwald
steven.mccarthy-grunwald@cumbria.ac.uk

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BOOK REVIEW**Mental Hospitals, Care Homes and Other Stories**

Frank McCutcheon

Fulmar Books. England: Taunton, 2021, 254 pages, ISBN 978-1-9196451-0-0, (paperback) £19.99 (Amazon)

Review by Steve McCarthy-Grunwald

University of Cumbria (UK)

The impact of reading stories about individual lived experiences can be very powerful, providing a ‘fly on the wall’ perspective to the stories enabling the reader to enhance personal knowledge and understanding. Experience Based Learning is a well-established pedagogical approach which is favoured in healthcare education programmes due to its ability to build bridges between theory and practice (Stacey et al., 2015) and promotes meaningful learning opportunities which are influential to multi professional roles.

Mental Hospitals, Care Homes and Other Stories is a new book for 2021 which offers 138 stories, gathered not only from the author's personal experiences; there are also stories which have been shared with the author from colleagues and other professions who they have worked with over an extensive career spanning over 45 years.

The author is clear from the outset of the potential impact this collection of stories harbours, therefore ensuring the need for privacy, respect and confidentiality are embedded throughout, reducing the potential of shame, embarrassment, or trauma to those who were directly affected in the stories, and for the potential of retribution. Consequently, the names, places, regional locations, and sensitive data from the real events have been significantly altered. Furthermore, the author's name ‘Frank McCutchen’ is a nom de plume to prevent those who know his real name from being able to piece together the identity of the experiences used.

The book provides a historical narrative of the lives of many individuals within mental health institutions or care homes whose ordeals involve very traumatic physical, psychological, or sexual abuse which most of the examples used were perpetrated by individuals who were supposed to be there to provide care, support, and protection for the individuals at a time of increased vulnerability. Although most of the stories are harrowing to read, some do offer a more light-hearted moment of humorous encounters, or potential outcomes which showed insight into the creative ways and solution focused approaches which can happen when services and staff ‘get it right’ by working collaboratively.

The book's content and focus should offer potential interest for both clinical or academic practitioners in a range of healthcare roles including counsellors, psychologists, doctors, nurses, Occupational Therapists or Lecturers to name a few. The content is well supported with detailed explanation alongside limited use of medicalised/psychiatric jargon with a helpful glossary of terms which anyone with an interest in this topic would find easy to follow.

As the reader makes their way through the book, there are several stories which interlink with either those involved, or similar themes to consider. Thematic analysis can offer a more comprehensive understanding of the values, attitudes and behaviours which present in these stories, which can then help to provide clarity on how and why certain actions can either help, hinder or hurt personal recovery (Smith & McDuff, 2017). If anything, this was one area which led to some repetition in the narrative stories, consequently, the book would benefit from having a reference section looking particularly at the themes and linking the relevant numbers of the stories/pages which would then increase the navigability of the book especially for those interested in using the text as a means of providing examples for an education purpose or bespoke sessions on a particular topic.

From a solution focused perspective *Mental Hospitals, Care Homes and Other Stories* offers a portal for the reader to use self-reflection, association with the lived experiences, personal and professional development and increasing self-awareness. The experiences show the importance of compassion and person-centred philosophy (Jakimowicz et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2018) particularly from a constructivist paradigm which claims that people generate knowledge and meaning by engaging with their own and others experiences by critically analysing them and applying them to similar personal accounts from practice (Jakimowicz et al., 2018; King et al., 2019).

This book will take you on a roller-coaster of emotions from anger and despair to hope and reconciliation. The realities of mental health services from the early 1900s to present are laid bare for all to dissect, offering examples of the best and worst of humanity to help recognise (from a solution focused perspective) what ‘works well’, what certainly needs to be less of, and how to work on fixing those examples which appear seriously broken...

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The reviewer

Steve McCarthy-Grunwald is a senior lecturer and pathway lead for mental health nursing at the University of Cumbria with over 26 years of clinical and academic experience.

Email: steven.mccarthy-grunwald@cumbria.ac.uk