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PSYCHOSIS. STORIES OF RECOVERY AND HOPE

Editors: Hannah Cordle, Jane Fradgley, Jerome Carson, Frank Holloway, Paul Richards

London: Quay Books, 2011. 213pp. Pb £19.99.

ISBN 978 1 85642 4202

This is a book about psychosis, comprising 14 recovery narratives by people speaking from personal experience. Each story is illustrated with photos of the author and uses the same structure: Background; Transition towards illness; Realisation of problem; Crisis points; Contact with services and treatment; Contact with mental health professionals; Transition towards recovery; Making recovery a reality; Hope; Reflection and Conclusion. The stories are diverse, authentic and moving.

The book is relevant to at least two groups. For people with lived experience of mental illness, the editorial imposition of a narrative structure makes more visible the great diversity in the authors' stories. Perhaps the most compelling message is that there are many and varied routes to recovery - Margaret Thatcher was my favourite. It is difficult not to feel more hopeful when exposed to this diversity, and this book should be available in waiting rooms throughout mental health services.

The book should also be required reading for mental health workers, as an antidote to any tendency to automatically ascribe improvement to treatment. The relationship with workers emerges as influential, being very positive for some ("believed in me", "a listening ear", "showing empathy and compassion"), and very negative for others ("patronising", "angry", "an absolute nightmare"). Clinical relationships are more than simply the vehicle by which effective treatments are provided: attending to the relationship *is* supporting recovery.

The contributions are contextualised by excellent overview chapters. Frank Holloway recognises the distinction between information, knowledge and wisdom – pointing to the complexity of arbitrating between competing understandings of psychosis, and the importance of empirical evaluation of what he terms "the Recovery approach". Jerome Carson describes his own journey as a professional engaging with the challenges of recovery, so speaks from experience in describing recovery as hard work. Glenn Roberts then highlights the central importance of narrative: "the search for a story to live by". The afterword shows how these stories support Retta Andresen's identification of key components of recovery: restoration of hope, development of a positive sense of identity, having a life that is meaningful, and taking more sense of responsibility for one's life. This book contributes to each of these goals.

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