

## Reviews

E. Strauss Smoller, *I Can't Remember, Family Stories of Alzheimer's Disease*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, US, 1997, 136 pp., \$24.95, ISBN 1-56639-555-0.

This text is one of a small, but growing number of publications that attempt to explore the experience of Alzheimer's disease from the perspective of the person who is suffering and their family. As such, it is a vivid and profound account from four people, who are intimately involved in the experience. The author portrays their experiences in an imaginative and unusual way, through the use of visual images as well as text.

The text is easy to read and flows well. Consequently, it is open to a wide audience, including families and carers of people with Alzheimer's disease and other types of dementia. It also makes compelling reading for professionals from all areas, who work with older people, offering an insightful and sometimes painful glimpse into the reality of the experience.

The first account is from the author's sister-in-law, who talks about her mother's decline and her family's experience of this. This account highlights the significance of the personality of the dementia sufferer before becoming ill. Lilian, in her earlier life, frequently expressed her grief at her difficult marriage and used her daughter as a confidante. It becomes evident as you read the account, that Lilian, no longer able to control herself, frequently asserts her grief at her loss and her now increasingly painful life. This clearly causes considerable distress to the family, who obviously feel a deep sense of pain at her expression of grief. The use of pictures gives a stark account of the effects on Lilian and her family, sometimes in a way that words alone cannot convey. This therefore presents a powerful argument for involving the whole family in order to understand the experience of Alzheimer's disease.

The second account is a narrative between the author and a man with Alzheimer's disease. Again, a strong factor coming through in this is Jim's sense of self. He clearly does find his illness frustrating and frightening. However he also has a very productive coping mechanism, in accepting the reality of the illness. His wife's subsequent account highlights how Jim is well supported by his family and is able to maintain a significant sense of wellbeing. Despite his difficulties he maintains a close and warm relationship with his children and his wife. Sherry, his wife, addresses issues of intimacy, which may well be more palatable to some because Jim is only 52, but very poignantly highlights the fact that closeness and love can remain a part of the relationship for some time.

Finally, we come to Jean's account of her experience of caring for her mother. It becomes clear that Jean has a very strong commitment to care, but that she, like many carers, cannot continue indefinitely. It portrays the difficulty of accepting the diagnosis and the impact it has on the person and

the family. It also very importantly highlights the decision to place her mother in care as related to her ability to recognise her and her home surroundings.

Overall, this book highlights some very significant issues in the experience of Alzheimer's disease. It emphasises the context of the family as a whole, portraying the impact on many different family members, even those who do not live close by. It also recognises very clearly, the complex issues facing carers, who often have to contend with looking for services as well as trying to cope with their own feelings. Finally, it highlights how important the presence of a supportive family is in enabling all to maintain a sense of wellbeing.

The only criticism that could be levelled at this book, is that the photographs are sometimes presented in a way that makes it difficult to read the text in a continuous way. The photographs provide a story in themselves though, and add to the whole book a meaning not normally found.

South Birmingham Mental Health Trust  
Birmingham

JENNY LA FONTAINE

Nancy Harding and Colin Palfrey, *The Social Construction of Dementia: Confused Professionals?* Jessica Kingsley, London, 1998, 174 pp., £16.95 pbk, ISBN 1-85302-257-8.

In this book, the authors draw upon a wide body of literature in an attempt to challenge, deconstruct and reconstruct traditional models of dementia in social constructionist terms. The main thesis of the book is founded upon the argument that dementia or Alzheimer's disease is socially constructed and that the main proponents of this construction are members of the medical profession. The authors critically argue against the medical/medically oriented approaches which have dominated traditional conceptions of dementia and seek to establish a firm basis for the social construction view.

This book is both comprehensive and thorough in the arguments it presents, although contentious at times. Whilst the subject matter is focused upon dementia per se, the issues this book addresses could be equally applied to the broad spectrum of health and social care. As such, the book is fully recommended as a valuable and timely core text which offers important perspectives on this field.

However, its rather complicated nature may limit the potential readership, and I rather felt that this book would have been more helpful if a greater emphasis had been placed upon the means by which social construction could be applied pragmatically to influence policy and practice.

Overall, whilst I would consider this book to be highly recommendable, it is often repetitive in the arguments it presents and overly critical of other perspectives, giving the reader the message that social construction is fundamentally the 'right approach'.

Social constructionism offers a different perspective on traditional models. I feel it would have been preferable if the authors had highlighted those differences in terms of their potential contribution to current theory, policy

and practice. Nevertheless, the book provides a solid foundation for social construction and should be considered as a valuable work of reference.

Dept of Psychology  
South Birmingham Mental Health Trust

ANDREW PAPADOPOULOS

Jonathan Parker and Bridget Penhale, *Forgotten People: Positive Approaches to Dementia Care*, Ashgate Publishing Ltd., Aldershot, Hampshire, 1998, 237 pp., £37.50 hbk, ISBN 1 85742 414 X.

Aimed at a social work audience, this book is a welcome addition to the publications on dementia care. There have been few publications which have targeted social workers as their audience. The standard text has been Chapman and Marshall's *Dementia: New Skills for Social Workers* (Chapman and Marshall 1993), but this predates both the introduction of the NHS and Community Care Act and CCETSW's Paper 30. (Paper 30 was published in 1995 by the Central Council for the Education and Training of Social Workers and details the requirements expected of social workers completing their education and training. It is based on demonstrations of competence to practice). *Forgotten People* plugs a gap in current bibliographies for social work training.

Divided into two parts, *Forgotten People* begins by setting the scene with three chapters which present models for understanding dementia, a brief history of welfare in the UK leading up to our current system of care management, and an introduction to social work training and the implications of Paper 30. The authors describe the 'standard paradigm' of dementia (Kitwood 1998), and present a synopsis of the work of Kitwood which challenges traditional 'medical model' thinking. They declare themselves as taking a middle view which accepts bits from each construction of dementia.

The second part is arguably the more valuable, presenting models for practice. In social work terms this means looking at different ways of working with users, considering the advantages and disadvantages of different models of intervention. The methods discussed cover a comprehensive range, and include crisis intervention, task-centred practice, counselling and psychotherapy, reminiscence and life review, groupwork and abuse. The authors include case studies and 'activities'. The case studies are often developed, so that we are given some information and are asked to reflect on our practice. Then further information is added and we are invited to reconsider. This clever device reflects the real world of social work practice and the dynamism of dementia. It will be invaluable in encouraging students to consider the complexities of working with people with dementia. The activity boxes draw the reader's attention to points for further consideration and discussion in the light of their own experiences and practice. These are a valuable aid for teachers and students who have to prove competence in so many ways that discussion for hypothetical situations becomes a necessity. The authors show their skill in drawing attention to 'real' and difficult issues without being patronising in their presentation.

In my view, the book misses a couple of important points. First, the tensions that can exist between people with dementia and their carers, and how social workers manage this when they are working with both parties; and secondly, the interface between social workers and health workers, and the tensions that this can cause. The publishers might like to note that biographies of the authors would be helpful in giving them a context and a credibility for the reader, and an explanation of the sources of the case studies would have been useful.

But don't let this put you off – they are minor points about a book which, I think, is a gem. Every social work student and every practice teacher working in the care of older people should have a copy of this book. It should appear on the reading list of every Diploma in Social Work course. I certainly wish it had been available to me when I was a practice teacher and had social work students on placement with me.

Chapman, A. and Marshall, M. (eds) 1993. *Dementia: New Skills for Social Workers*, Jessica Kingsley, London.

Kitwood, T. 1998. *Dementia Reconsidered*, Open University Press, Buckingham.

Dementia Voice  
Bristol

JANE GILLIARD

Sylvia Cox, Irene Anderson and Sally Dick, *Jean Elgar the Person, the Community and Dementia: Developing a Value Framework*, Dementia Services Development Centre, Stirling, 1998, 45 pp., £9.00, no ISBN.

There has been a welcome change in recent years in the field of dementia care. The shift has seen a reduction of the medical model of disease, predominant through much of this century, towards a more holistic, person-centred view of the individual with dementia and their need for care. Much of this change has been due to the work of the Dementia Services Development Centre based at the University of Stirling in Scotland. This slim volume is a recent addition to the literature emanating from the Centre and is to be welcomed as such.

One of the areas identified by the Development Centre as in need of attention is that concerning values within the field of dementia care. This document seeks to begin to address this area by looking at how values contribute to an understanding of dementia and the provision of appropriate support and care. If agreement can be reached on the core values involved, then these can be used to determine whether the care provided for an individual constitutes 'best practice'. Outcomes of services should be considered in relation to such core values but must also be individualised so that the outcome is evaluated in terms of its impact for each person as an individual, not in relation to a group of service users. The development of a framework for ethical practice with individuals is therefore set alongside a thorough consideration of the necessary value base. This is therefore a pleasing addition to the literature as it provides a much needed overview of the major

research, theoretical and professional perspectives on the topic of values within dementia care and seeks to develop these further.

Following the overview concerning existing work in this area, there is a description of the process by which the framework was developed, together with the framework itself. The five values that have been derived through the work are: maximising personal control; enabling choice; respecting dignity; preserving continuity; promoting equity. There are five levels at which these values operate in terms of the overall framework that has been developed. The values and levels that comprise the framework were derived from a number of workshop sessions with individuals, including professionals. These were then further refined in the light of workshop findings.

The document is produced with the explicit aim of introducing the concepts to as wide an audience as possible so that the framework can be tested out and developed more fully. Indeed, there is a comments section at the end of the document to facilitate responses to the project group. This is both a strength and a weakness of the work. Whilst it is clear that in some respects this document represents work in progress and is part of an evolutionary process, it may have been useful to have included rather more from the workshop sessions being held, as the work clearly has a slightly 'incomplete' feel to it. On the other hand, the authors are to be commended for their wish to encourage a more participative approach to the issue, and their wish to reach as wide an audience as possible. The book is written in a clear and accessible manner and is recommended for all those who work in, or who are interested in the field or, more generally, in ethics and values in professional practice.

University of Hull

BRIDGET PENHALE