

Book Review

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The Evergreen Guide: Helping People to Survive and Thrive in Later Years. Edited by Declan Lyons (200 pp.; ISBN 978-1-62948-714-4). Nova Science Publishers Inc.: New York, 2014

With an ageing worldwide population, there is an ever growing need for expansion and development of services provided to older adults in order to maintain and maximise their ability for meaningful and independent functioning in society. Within this cohort of individuals, older adults with mental illness are a particularly underrepresented and vulnerable population. Recognising this need and the opportunity to improve care for his patients, Dr Declan Lyons has progressed the development of The Evergreen Programme, a holistic course for older adults based in St. Patrick's University Hospital in Dublin, Ireland. This innovative course focusses on restoring psychosocial functioning in acutely unwell individuals with mental illness. Led by a multidisciplinary team of doctors, nursing staff, psychologists, and allied health professionals, Dr Lyons' programme consists of six weekly modules addressing the unique psychosocial needs of elderly clients. With the success of this programme in its home institution, Dr Lyons has made it accessible to all in this well-thought out guide entitled *The Evergreen Guide*.

Drawing on the cumulative experience of a team of experts, the programme aims to 'restore psychosocial functioning, independence and well-being among acutely ill older people with mental illness'. Beginning with an introductory overview of the programme, several useful tips and considerations are provided to assist those beginning or continuing to educate small groups of elderly clients. Each subsequent chapter of *The Evergreen Guide*, which encompasses a module of the programme, is authored by a unique specialist within the multidisciplinary team with relevant expertise. This multifaceted approach to delivering content recapitulates the ethos of the programme itself which endeavours to deliver well-rounded and mindful care to all aspects of this vulnerable population in society. With a format designed to engage its audience, each module begins with reflective questions, provides evidence-based educational content, and ends with key learning points and suggestions for further reading where appropriate. Some of the topics include common mental health illness in later life, attitudes towards age

stereotyping, loss, safe use of medication and common physical illnesses in later life.

A stand-out chapter that captures the essence of the Evergreen's ideology is titled 'spirituality, health and ageing' by Dr Maria Frampton. With an emphasis on the connection between mind, body and spirit, Dr Frampton addresses an integral element to an individual's identity which can be overlooked in day-to-day patient care – spirituality. The chapter neatly amalgamates the concept of spirituality and ageing, giving the reader a methodology to bring this to a small group setting in an accessible and understandable way. This is exemplified by a session of the module focussed on specific methods to incorporate spirituality into day-to-day life. As Victor Frankl postulated 'the spiritual dimension cannot be ignored, for it is what makes us human'.

The Evergreen Guide is easily tailored to suit the needs of different healthcare professionals. Although its primary goal is to aid those in mental healthcare-seeking guidance on format and content for small group work, the *Guide's* concepts are universal to ageing populations and would be useful in any healthcare setting requiring continuing education in psychosocial functioning in later life. The *Guide* can be strictly adhered to as a standalone 6-week programme, however, its flexibility allows the reader to extract key points as needed to enhance dynamics in their existing groups. The programme directs, but does not dictate, the order and method of delivering its material.

Just as an evergreen tree maintains its colour despite the harsh weather of winter, Dr Lyons' Evergreen Programme 'symbolises strength over adversity, inherently promoting a positive view of ageing with emphasis on ability rather than disability'. With its provision of practical tools to help accomplish its mission holistically and sensitively, *The Evergreen Guide* gives direction on how to cultivate and individualise the programme to provide integral services for older adults with mental illness in any environment. By fostering a positive outlook on an elderly population and encouraging self-empowered development of its audience, *The Evergreen Guide* is a valuable addition to the shelves of any organisation which attends to the physical, psychological, social, spiritual and mental healthcare needs of the elderly.

Conflicts of Interest

None.

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