

Overcoming Alcohol Misuse – A 28 Day Guide

**Conor Farren. Published by Kite Books, Ireland
Paperback, 319 pages. ISBN; 9781842182130**

This book is very timely. Ireland is at low ebb economically and, not surprisingly, drug and alcohol problems are increasing at an alarming rate, according to all of the experts working in the healthcare field. Remarkably and tragically at the same time services are being curtailed.

Go into any bookshop and look for information on Alcohol, our number one social and health problem and you will be amazed to find a relative dearth of Irish literature on the subject. There are of course a few exceptions.

It is great to see a working consultant psychiatrist writing about this most important topic. I believe I am right in saying that this is the first specialty book on alcohol by any Irish psychiatrist since Dr JG Cooney launched the first edition of his seminal work, "Under the Weather" in 1991. That book became a best seller showing clearly that patients and family members are hungry for well-written, accurate information from specialists on this subject. The public services are 'hit and miss' at best in certain geographical areas and therefore the desperate need for more up to date information on services and accessible treatment is essential. This book certainly responds to that thirst (pun intended!).

In fact this is in effect three books in one. There are three main serial themes running throughout it; Descriptive case studies or vignettes in every chapter, lots of academic content including information for ordinary people, and the trials and tribulations of 'Joe', a married man, following through his 28 day detoxification and rehabilitation programme. There are 28 chapters in all and Joe's daily struggles are commented on at the end of each chapter. As the author points out, hence the title, as many rehab programmes are also 28 days long. Will Joe get better? – I guess we might have to wait for the sequel but this reviewer found himself interested by his progress and read all about Joe first. Demystifying treatment is very important as many people are afraid of this step and Dr Farren makes this aspect of treatment very real and personalised. A client of this reviewer said that he would be 'more willing to do a programme as a result of reading this book'.

The author uses many of his own sayings and phrases throughout the book displaying in particular his knowledge of dual diagnosis as it relates to alcohol problems. He also has highlighted truisms in every chapter, for example, "Sometimes the damage done by alcohol is irreversible". He is realistic about relapse rates. This is not a negative book however; rather it is honest and offers tangible hope for people with alcohol problems, "Effort triumphs over any other factor as a predictor of success". He emphasises the importance of persistence in efforts to recover. In another part of the book he says that research reveals that treatment retention equates to treatment success.

He addresses the many complicated dilemmas facing families and friends. There is real hope provided for families too in this tome, "Amazing as it sounds, most families where the alcohol misuser enters true recovery do very well".

Other chapters deal with the effects of alcohol on the body, questionnaires for self-assessment, causes, relapse, craving, mental health complications, medications, insight, self-help groups and much more besides. Dr Farren's knowledge of research, his long clinical experience and expertise, as well as his concern for patients are constantly evident throughout this book. There is something for everyone interested in this subject and answers to most questions about alcohol treatment.

This book is comprehensive. It has already been very well received in all quarters and I believe it will make a significant difference to the lives of many people seeking help.

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Changing Minds: Home not Hospital

**Marina Bowe, Patrick Devitt, Finian Kelly. TAF
Publishing, 2011. ISBN 978-1-90752237-6**

"Changing Minds: Home not Hospital" is an absorbing, important book published to mark 21 years of the Clondalkin Mental Health Service in Dublin. The authors describe the development of Ireland's first community psychiatry team, from its foundation in 1989, and through its consolidation and development over the following twenty-one years. The book is authored by three consultant psychiatrists who have worked in the Clondalkin Mental Health Service at various points throughout this time: Dr Marina Bowe, Dr Patrick Devitt and Dr Finian Kelly.

The Clondalkin Mental Health Service is fundamentally based on the idea that individuals with mental illness should, insofar as possible, be treated in their homes. Home treatment is promoted instead of admission to hospital because admission may ultimately prove lengthy, of dubious therapeutic value, and potentially distancing and disempowering for the individual. Treatment at home, when possible, permits the individual to remain in their family and community setting, and learn the work, leisure and relationship skills needed for recovery in the setting in which they live. In other words, home treatment is often more integrated, organic and meaningful for the individual affected by mental illness, and their family.

Against this backdrop, "Changing Minds: Home not Hospital" is a truly fascinating book, which paints a clear and compelling picture of the Clondalkin Mental Health Service from the time of its foundation, by Dr Ian Daly and the original team, right up to the present day. There are contributions from, and interviews with, a broad range of individuals, including Dr Ian Daly, Dr Dermot Walsh, John Saunders, Rosaleen Molloy, Victoria Somers, Dr Fiona Keogh, Dr Marina Bowe, Dr Patrick Devitt, Dr Finian Kelly, Dr Clare O'Toole and Michael

McGlynn. There are also accounts of patients' experiences of the service, the research background to the home treatment approach, and information on day-to-day activities of the team.

It is a unique book for several reasons including the fact that it describes a psychiatric service unique in Ireland, and incorporates a diversity of inputs which makes it uniquely inclusive and insightful. What is most immediately striking, however, is that this book is one of the very few accounts of reform in Irish mental health services which conveys the feeling of the reform – the ideas that drove it, the way it worked out in real-life, and lessons learned over the past 21 years. On this basis, this book succeeds as an account of the foundation of the Clondalkin team, a valuable slice of Dublin's social history, and a rousing manifesto for further reform of Irish mental health services.

The book was supported by generous assistance from the Mental Health Commission, which is greatly to be thanked for its farsightedness. The foreword, written by John Saunders, director of SHINE, concludes that the book is essential reading for anyone involved in changing and reforming mental health services.

The book is, perhaps, especially relevant in an era when the vision outlined in "A Vision for Change" is to be implemented, and the enthusiasm which drove the Clondalkin Mental Health Service needs to be replicated in all mental health services around the country – and beyond.

Copies of "Changing Minds: Home not Hospital" are available from The Administrator, Clondalkin Mental Health Service, Unit 1A Village Centre, Orchard Road, Clondalkin, Dublin 22. Telephone: 01 464 4231. Fax: 01 457 0588. Email: louise.deans@hse.ie.

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Unhinged: The trouble with psychiatry – a doctor's revelations about a profession in crisis

Daniel J. Carlat. Free Press: New York, 2010 (272pp). ISBN-10: 141659079X.

Psychiatrists have got to be the most criticised of all medical specialists. We regularly get dismissed as charlatans, coercive agents of the state, disease mongers and drug pushers. Many writers adopt polemical unbalanced anti-psychiatry positions while others can be blandly uncritical in their views. This recently published critique of the profession by Daniel J Carlat offers something different. Part confessional memoir and part

challenging exposé, it makes for compelling reading.

Daniel Carlat is a Harvard/Mass General trained psychiatrist who is now in a single-handed psychiatric office-based practice North of Boston. In recent years he has been publishing a widely followed on-line critique of psychiatric research and poorly evidence based practices, called the Carlat Psychiatry Report (<http://thecarlatreport.com>).

Carlat talks revealingly in this book about his own experiences as a psychopharmacology oriented psychiatrist and his work with the pharmaceutical industry until he decided that this was compromising his ethics. He describes in fascinating detail some of the indefensible practices of some of the biggest names in US psychiatry such as acting as hired guns, ghost writing of their research papers by pharmaceutical writers, having financial vested interests and so on. He also writes absorbingly about the muddled processes of arriving at the diagnostic categories for the various versions of the DSM.

Carlat's essential point is that most psychiatrists after the 1970s believed that neurobiology would deliver ever greater advances in the treatment of mental illnesses but that this has not happened as predicted. Along the way, he asserts that our profession have largely lost their psychotherapeutic skills and that now in order to cover up our therapeutic frailties, we hide behind inaccurate neurobiological babble as we tweak prescriptions this way and that and expand our reach further along the spectrum of normality, all the while being cheered on by big Pharma.

Carlat believes that psychiatric disorders are real and that psychoactive medications and ECT are very beneficial for them but thinks that biological treatments have not really advanced since the 1950s. He proposes that psychotherapy should reclaim its rightful place in every psychiatrist's arsenal. His most radical solution is one that few in the profession will agree with: he thinks that psychiatry and psychology should be amalgamated as a separate profession from medicine, rather like dentistry is.

Carlat's writing lacks the intellectual weight of Anthony Clare's great book about the state of psychiatry in the 1970s, *Psychiatry in Dissent*.¹ Most Irish psychiatrists will be struck by the amount of medication that Carlat prescribes for his patients and will not agree with his imputation that they spend most of their time just medicating. Carlat's tone is rather melodramatic at times and his descriptions over-simplified. His solutions for the profession also strike me as misguided and likely to emphasise the mind body division and increase stigma. Nonetheless this is a very readable, entertaining, well argued, often wise and relatively balanced exploration of some of the key questions facing psychiatry at the present time. I would recommend that anybody interested in psychiatry today reads it.

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Reference

1. Clare A. *Psychiatry in Dissent: Controversial Issues in Thought and Practice*. Tavistock Publications, 1976.