

Book Reviews

Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine, 31 (2014).
doi:10.1017/ipm.2014.45

Learning Solution Focused Therapy: An Illustrated Guide.

Edited by Anne Bodmer Lutz (232pp.; ISBN: 978-1-58562-452-2). American Psychiatric Publishing: Washington DC, London, England, 2014.

Since Sigmund Freud popularised Psychoanalysis back in the early 1900s, most Psychiatric theories have, in one way or another, attempted to unmask and solve patient's problems through exploring them in varying degrees of depth. While Psychoanalysis focuses primarily on past trauma, more recent approaches such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy focus on the here and now, identifying maladaptive cognitive strategies and attempting to challenge the cognitions themselves and the behaviours associated with them. What these theories and others have in common is that identifying and treating the problem itself is central to a successful outcome.

Brief Solution-Focused Therapy takes a different approach. Developed by de Shazer and colleagues as a form of family therapy, it focuses on building solutions and believes that the problem itself is often almost irrelevant. In her new book, *Learning Solution Focused Therapy: An Illustrated Guide*, Dr Anne Bodmer Lutz takes us through the principle techniques it uses to do so. Dr Lutz, who is the Director of Training of the Institute for Solution-Focused Therapy, Massachusetts and has extensive experience in this field, does an admirable job in presenting a brief and clear outline of what Solution-Focused Therapy involves and a practical guide on how to utilise its techniques.

Solution-Focused Therapy was developed through examining hours of videotaped sessions with patients in an attempt to ascertain what practical techniques work best in a therapeutic setting. What resulted was very much a patient-centred approach focusing on positive techniques such as complements, goal negotiation and focusing on the patient's strengths and resources. This is in contrast to the standard medical model in which eliciting pathology is regarded as key to treatment. While this book focuses mainly on its use as a form of therapy for children and families, Dr Lutz is keen to point out that the techniques used can also be integrated into the standard Psychiatric assessment and other areas such as Psychopharmacotherapy and Addiction.

One of the strengths of this book is the use of case studies and practical examples to illustrate the application of Solution-Focused Techniques in a clinical

setting. Cases are laid out as conversations between the patient and therapist and include discussion and commentary from the author. For example, Beth is an 18 year old who has suffered significant loss and trauma as a child and subsequently has been diagnosed with a non-verbal learning disorder as well as depression and executive functioning difficulties. The Solution-Focused Therapist uses key sets of questions while interviewing Beth. She begins by asking what she is good at or enjoys, and helps her to identify the most important people in her life (known as VIPs). The patient's main goals are established (goal negotiation), and times when she felt well are explored for differences to her current situation (amplification of positive differences). Throughout the interview, rating scales of 1–10 are used to help the patient rate her emotions and experiences (scaling questions). These questions and others help focus the patient on solutions through exploring times when their problems were either not present or not as troubling as they are now. Another prime example of this is when the patient is asked to imagine a 'miracle day', where they wake up and their problem has magically disappeared. The therapist then ascertains what is different about this miracle day as a means to identifying possible solutions to the problem presented.

Throughout these sets of questions, the author gives detailed commentary on their purpose, how they should be asked and what is hoped to be achieved by asking them. A high degree of importance is placed on the language used and avoiding negative statements or those that could be construed as judgmental. Detailed case studies such as this are used throughout the book and are particularly useful in illustrating the practical applications of Solution-Focused Techniques.

The core techniques outlined above (i.e. beginning with strengths and resources, scaling questions and amplification of positive difference, etc.) are explored in more detail in subsequent chapters. The book is well structured and concise, with each chapter containing a brief introduction, tables with sample questions, links to video illustrations, case vignettes and commentary. Key points and references for further reading are also given at the end of each chapter. This gives the book a very practical feel, with case vignettes taken from real cases that the author has worked with and good descriptions and commentary adding clarity to the practical application of Solution-Focused Techniques. A library of 30 video links is easily accessible online, showing how one might use these techniques in real patient scenarios. These videos are short but serve to illustrate specific aspects of Solution-Focused Therapy, such as beginning with problem free talk or using scaling questions, by showing a simulated interview between therapist and patient. The book ends with

useful chapters on how to integrate Solution-Focused Techniques discussed into other areas such as the Psychiatric assessment and its uses in Psychopharmacotherapy and Addiction.

Although the Solution-Focused Approach doesn't necessarily come intuitively to doctors used to being taught how to illicit and describe pathological processes, there is much to be gained from reading this concise and practical book. The therapeutic alliance is key to our encounters as Psychiatrists and doctors, and at the very least, the Solution-Focused Approach provides us with valuable skills in this area. It can be adopted either partially or fully and can be integrated into the more standard Psychiatric Assessment and into other areas such as Psychopharmacotherapy and Addiction. This interesting and practical book gives an excellent guide to utilising these techniques and presents an easy and stimulating read for mental health care professionals and others alike.

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First published online 13 August 2014

Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine, 31 (2014).
 doi:10.1017/ipm.2014.40

How to Succeed in Psychiatry. Edited by Andrea Fiorello,
 Iris T. Calliess and Henning Sass (332pp.; ISBN 978-1-
 1199-9866-2), Wiley-Blackwell: UK, 2012.

This book, aimed at early career Psychiatrists and trainees, opens by asking you the question 'What does it take to be a Psychiatrist today?' and while this, of course, depends on what type of a Psychiatrist you wish to be, by the end of it you will certainly have a sense of what you could do to guide your career in the direction you would like it to take. Written in a colloquial style, it contains information that will not, I imagine, be found easily elsewhere. Instead this book reads like the dispensations of an experienced senior reg or consultant giving you their hard-earned advice for you to consider.

With 21 chapters written by 50 authors, many of whom are senior trainees or early career consultants themselves, the book is structured over three sections that broadly follow the career pathway from trainee to consultant. The first gives an overview of psychiatry training in European countries and in the United States. The subsequent chapters are written about key areas of

focus for psychiatry trainees namely developing skills in psychotherapy, working in community psychiatry, writing up a paper and developing research skills among others. The middle section relates to the transition into the role of Consultant Psychiatrist with focus on opportunities in public and private sectors, professionalism, ethics, and leadership and management. The final section describes continuing professional development and gives an account of the role of psychiatry associations. Exclusive to the focus on personal career development there are several chapters that deal with several disparate issues affecting psychiatry today, for example, recruitment of trainees, the importance of phenomenological psychopathology and psychiatry in the developing world. While this can unbalance the stated aims of the book to be a 'survival guide to help you through the first years of practicing psychiatry', chapters such as these are provocative and may spur you on to read up on such important areas.

I found this book to be most useful and would have no hesitation in recommending it to fellow trainees in psychiatry, especially those at the start of their training. For many trainees, it can come as a surprise when they realise that more is expected of them in order to continue onto higher specialist training, apart from their hard-earned membership qualification. Therefore, becoming proficient in areas like research and psychotherapy early on, as this book clearly highlights, is essential (of course developing such proficiencies is dependent on the opportunities available to the trainee as well). However, the emphasis, as it should be, is not to learn these skills to simply get onto the next step, it is to develop as a Psychiatrist. While entire books and courses are written about Membership examinations whose curriculum and questions populate the workspace and mind of every BST, I don't think I ever came across information on, for example, the symptoms and signs of burnout for doctors in psychiatry or what it is like becoming a consultant for the first time, both of which are given their own chapter in this book.

The writing style throughout is characterised by clarity and in tackling the speedbumps one encounters along the career path, advice is dispensed with sheer practicality. For example, a chapter on developing a research career in the absence of a funded programme contains a list of research grants to apply for funding sources, many of which one may not have been aware of.

What constitutes success in Psychiatry is a debate in itself. This book does not answer such a question for you, it gives you the information and tools so that you can decide what you would be most successful at; and if you have no clue about any of them, it will make you think more about them so that you can decide. All trainees should pick up a copy of