

Reviews

Social Policy First Hand: An International Introduction to Participatory Social Welfare

Beresford, P. & Carr, S. (eds.), *Bristol: Policy Press, 2018*

ISBN: 978-1447332367 (pbk), £24.99, pp.320

According to the editors, this book is the first exploration of participatory social policy internationally, critiquing its nature, origins and possibilities, as well as the issues and problems it faces. They point out that they have not sought to privilege any one perspective or set of knowledges, stressing the importance of an international and inclusive approach, and noting that chapters are of different styles and lengths (on average, just over 8 pages per chapter, with some very brief at about 2.5 pages).

The book covers a great variety of sectors and topics (e.g. health, housing, education, employment, poverty, citizenship, disability, equality, race, gender, ageing, and dying). It contains 50 chapters organised into eight parts. The first four parts focus on the need for and the knowledge base of participatory social policy: service users and social policy; critiquing and reconceiving Beveridge's 'five giant evils'; the contribution of service users' knowledges; an inclusive life course and developmental approach of social policy. The last four are on 'making it happen': transforming social policy; campaigning and change; breaking down barriers; and participatory research and evaluation. The book has some 80 contributors, including academics, activists and service users. While this cast is international, I estimate that about 52 of the 80 contributors are based in the UK, with a further 21 from Australia and New Zealand (including many linked to two universities there).

It is clearly impossible to cover these very diverse chapters in detail, so I will focus on a few main themes, and on some unanswered questions. At one level, it is possible to sum up the book's overall approach with reference to George Orwell's '1984' and Jonathan Bradshaw's (1972) 'Taxonomy of Social Need'. Orwell writes that 'If there is hope it lies in the proles' (cited by Beresford, 2016, p.333). Participatory social welfare would appear to favour Bradshaw's 'felt need' over expert-derived 'normative need'. However, at a deeper level, it seems to me that there are some unresolved issues.

The first such issue concerns who we should be listening to. The book mentions a large number of keywords or clues: 'participatory', 'people on the receiving end', 'subjects of social policy (especially of its more 'heavy end')', 'real say'; 'new voices', 'first hand voices', 'first-hand experience', 'lived experience', 'marginalised perspectives', 'experiential knowledge', 'grassroots activists', 'service users' and 'voiceless' service users. However, as Ruth Lister points out in the book, 'users are not a separate group... We all experience social policy in various ways' (p. viii), albeit not all at the 'heavy end'. It is not clear whose of these voices should count most (especially in that they are sometimes in conflict). Should it be all voices, or 'vulnerable' or 'less heard' voices; individual voices (including through choice and voice mechanisms) or the voices of groups or collectives? A recent local example in Birmingham involved sincerely held but conflicting views about placing LGBT issues on the school curriculum – conflicts between school staff and some local, predominantly Muslim, parents, with others also taking part in demonstrations. To use a vast over-simplification, it is possible that each side could accuse the other of homophobia and Islamophobia. So, who decides whose views count on the issue in question?

According to the editors, this book is a response to growing calls for a different approach to social policy; one that is truly participatory and democratic, rather than paternalistic and controlling (p. 1). However, it could be said that some of the contributors can appear a little 'paternalistic and controlling' at times. Danny Dorling writes that in the UK '52% of those who voted in the (2016) EU Referendum decided to leave the EU because they were told it was the only way things could get better. They were fooled' he says (p.19), but later adds, without acknowledging the irony, that 'Social policy has to be the product of millions of minds' (p.20). One assumes that in the 1975 Referendum vote, those 'fooled' included Tony Benn, Michael Foot, Barbara Castle, and a young Jeremy Corbyn. Similarly, Peter Taylor-Gooby suggests that the 2016 UK referendum shows how an 'ostensibly participative and grassroots movement among the more vulnerable groups can have damaging consequences for the inclusiveness of the welfare state' (p.30). To adapt a notorious term used by the railway industry about autumn leaves, clearly this was the wrong sort of participation. To over-extend the point for effect, the EU Referendum analysis elsewhere saw some academics demonising and 'othering' working class communities, while in effect standing shoulder to shoulder with the 'establishment': CEOs, millionaires, high court judges and the political class.

The second unclear issue concerns what sort of evidence counts. Stressing, as the book does, the importance of 'experiential knowledge' sounds like a rejection of 'expert' or 'scientific' knowledge. However, Ruth Lister writes that it has become politically fashionable on the Right to dismiss 'traditional 'experts' (e.g. Conservative politician Michael Gove's claim that people have had enough of experts or Donald Trump rejecting the scientific evidence on climate change). She continues that 'while such attitudes have been justly castigated, participatory approaches to social policy do create a challenge for those of us considered 'experts' on the subjects it addresses' (p. viii). Gove was arguing against what he saw as flawed previous forecasts of economists, but nevertheless appeared to believe climate change experts in his role as Environment Secretary. Moreover, (to the present reviewer, as probably one of the few social policy academics who has lived in an ex-mining village), the climate change expert view argument seems to suggest that earlier politicians were correct (albeit for different reasons) to choose to close coal mines and so devastate working class communities.

The editors write that 'some first-hand voices are sometimes dismissed as testimonies, anecdotal or just 'bearing witness' (p.8). However, previously Peter Beresford (2008) has criticised 'cosy stories of a few people's gains from individual budgets (being)... used to sell one of the biggest, least evidenced, reforms to be introduced since the founding of the welfare state.' It is easy to support the argument for responding to free speech when we agree with the speaker. Similarly, the approach here seems to suggest that we should listen to the voices of those with whom we agree, but we should dismiss similar evidence from the 'wrong' sort of people when it suits. To adapt Orwell, 'If there is hope, it lies in the proles... so long as they agree with the Inner Party' (1984) and 'All service users are equal... but some are more equal than others' (Animal Farm).

The final unclear issue relates to the criticism made of traditional social policy, both the politics and the academic literature. The editors make trenchant criticisms of 'mainstream' or 'conventional' social policy. It is claimed that social policy is still largely characterised by being top-down, non-participatory and essentially economic (subordinating social issues to narrowly economic ones). Nevertheless, as Bradshaw pointed out in his 1972 article, 'the policy maker still has to make complex decisions about which categories of need should be given priority'. Moreover, they point out that a well-known social policy textbook (not by the present reviewer) contains chapters on service users (written by a non-service user) and on disabled people (written by a non-disabled person). I am not sure if similar charges might not be brought against this book, whether or not the general point is arguable. Certainly, there is a mix of 'first person' narratives, some co-produced work, and academics writing to represent the views of groups and users, with the latter being fairly close to some 'conventional' social policy contributions to textbooks. The editors, though, argue that the 'defining characteristic' of conventional social policy is that it has been non-participatory (p.4). It is stated that 'moving to participatory social policy represents a paradigm shift', involving a different set of values and principles, a radically different

approach to understanding, studying, analysing, and researching social policy (p.1). Accordingly, it is claimed that the book does not read like a 'traditional social policy text, and it cannot be judged in the same terms as conventional social policy, because 'a participatory approach generates new theoretical discussions and approaches' (p.9). It is perfectly reasonable, and familiar, to criticise 'traditional positivist research assumptions' about rigour, reliability and replicability in social policy. However, in my view, a significant proportion of social policy research is not in fact based on 'traditional positivist research assumptions', but rather, for example, on critical, narrative and interpretative approaches. Moreover, the editors would also need to offer clearer alternative criteria (authenticity, inclusion etc) and approaches (e.g. narrative policy theory, participatory action research, co-production, user-controlled research) to make their message more compelling. A stronger concluding chapter longer than the present seven pages could have attempted to pull together key messages from the very diverse styles and elements within. However, the book brings together a great number and variety of voices that have been too rarely heard, and it is thus at least a useful counter-balance to much 'traditional' social policy writing.

References

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Understanding the Mixed Economy of Welfare Powell, M. (ed.), *Second Edition*, Bristol: Policy Press, 2019

ISBN: 978-1447333227 (pbk), £21.99, pp.250

This edited work is the second edition of a text originally written in 2007 by Martin Powell and colleagues. This second edition provides an update and, arguably, an even more prescient and relevant exploration of how welfare might now be provided increasingly by a mixture of welfare providers, not least within the private and/or voluntary/informal/independent sectors. This is as the state itself withdraws its involvement in a variety of ways, not least in the funding, direct provision and regulation of welfare. For those who have been brought up as recipients of, advocates for, providers of and ideological sympathisers with state funded, governed and delivered welfare, this is a timely reminder that there is no 'natural', preordained set of arrangements in the provision of welfare.

Powell explains in the introductory chapter that the mixed economy of welfare (MEW) can be broken down into its components of state, market, voluntary and informal. The book considers these components alongside and interacting with what he describes as the social division of welfare (SDW) which comprise statutory, occupational and fiscal dimensions, ultimately a breakdown derived from Richard Titmuss.

Powell and his contributors set about explaining and exploring the connections between the various components of both the MEW and the SDW, arguing that these are often neglected in academic texts and analyses, which have tended to focus 'on the individual trees rather than on the wood...; put another way, while the individual pieces of the jigsaw have been described, there has been little attempt to piece them together in order to see the whole picture' (p.3). Also, he argues that one needs to provide a three-dimensional analysis of welfare provision rather than the usual one-dimensional picture of the nature of provision (public, market, voluntary, informal). This is to be done by considering also the dimensions (and interconnectedness) of service finance (state funded or subsidised as opposed to personal funding or payment, and of regulation (where the state may choose to regulate or control prices and/or standards rather than provide directly).

This three-dimensional depiction allows Powell to create a tabulation of the various possible welfare arrangements, depending on whether:

- the provision is state, market, by voluntary provider, or informal,
- the financing of such provision is via state funding, the market (individual payment), voluntary (e.g. via charitable funding) or informal, and
- whether such provision is highly regulated, or the regulation level is low (though recognising that this binary construction of levels of regulation is somewhat stark).

From this, Powell suggests that there are some 32 i.e. 16 x 2 (*sic*) possible welfare arrangements:

		Provision			
		State	Market	Voluntary	Informal
Finance	State	1a (high reg.)	2a	3a	4a
		1b (low reg.)	2b	3b	4b
	Market	5a	6a	7a	8a
		5b	6b	7b	8b
	Voluntary	9a	10a	11a	12a
		9b	10b	11b	12b
	Informal	13a	14a	15a	16a
		13b	14b	15b	16b

This table is applied in the concluding chapter by Powell and, variously, by other contributors where, following the introductory chapter, the book further explores the nature of the MEW and SDW. This is through chapters on: the mixed economy of welfare (John Stewart), the state (Brian Lund), market welfare (Robin Miller), voluntary and community welfare (Rob Macmillan and James Rees), informal welfare (Martin Powell), the benefits and inequalities of fiscal welfare (Adrian Sinfield), occupational welfare (Edward Brunsdon and Margaret May), the mixed economy of welfare: a comparative perspective (Michael Hill), before, as mentioned above, returning in the final chapter to an analysis of the mixed economy of welfare and the social division of welfare (Martin Powell). For me, the more interesting chapters are the latter ones that explore areas of welfare provision that are less frequently examined: fiscal welfare, occupational welfare, and a comparative analysis.

In 'The mixed economy of welfare in historical context', John Stewart explores the patterns of welfare provision historically, noting that we mistakenly often overemphasise the role of the state in the provision of welfare. He focuses, therefore, not only on the role of the state in providing welfare but also on the role of the family, the market and the 'third sector', arguing that the role and extent of each has changed over time, because the mixed economy of welfare is a dynamic and changing phenomenon dependent upon the prevailing context.

Brian Lund then explores the role and nature of the state in welfare provision, noting that this can be thought of in terms of state funding as well as provision, providing four possible sets of arrangements (public finance/public provision; public finance/private provision; private finance/public provision; and, private finance/private provision); and that for the major areas of welfare (housing, health, education, social care, social security) there has been an increasing emphasis on the state steering rather than providing, via quasi markets and the introduction of new managerialism, as well as a shift into the private domain. Nevertheless, with the impact of devolution in the UK, one is also witnessing greater welfare plurality within the four countries of the UK.

Robin Miller explores market welfare and, in some respects, continues to explore the configurations used by Lund when considering the role of the market, adapting Burchardt's (1997) *wheels of welfare* typology. In so doing, he does make the important distinction between 'marketisation' and privatisation. A major part of this chapter then looks at the increased influence of privatisation in the NHS. He concludes by saying that rather than simply focusing on the role of markets in funding and provision of welfare, one needs to consider the actual impact, which itself will be dependent upon the local and wider political and economic context.

In the following two chapters, Rob Macmillan and James Rees explore the role of voluntary organisations and community groups in the provision of welfare; and Martin Powell then discusses the role of families, particularly women, in providing informal care. He argues that for many people, including older and disabled people, the main source of care is their families, rather than the state or independent / third sector.

In the chapter on the benefits and inequalities of fiscal welfare, Adrian Sinfield focuses on the effects of fiscal welfare, including taxation and (particularly) tax credits and pensions tax relief. This is an area that is rarely examined, not least because the UK Treasury, which has responsibility for overseeing them, does not regard them as part of public spending even though there are estimated to be over 1,000 types of tax relief in the UK. Indeed, it is interesting that income tax and National Insurance benefits and pensions tax relief have rarely been scrutinised (benefiting, as they do, higher earners) whereas tax credits (for lower earners) have been the subject of quite detailed public (including parliamentary) scrutiny. Sinfield's conclusions are that fiscal welfare arrangements are, overall, regressive and thus widen inequalities, even though governments and the media often portray them within a narrative of fairness, along the lines of an 'individualistic calculus, where you get out what you put in' (p.151).

In their chapter on occupational welfare, Edward Brunson and Margaret May explore another often neglected focus of analysis, that is the benefits afforded to people in work (typically employees but also partners and employers). The main benefits, and those that Brunson and May use as case studies, are workplace pensions and health care. However, there are other occupational benefits, some due to mandatory/legislative direction, such as occupational pensions and sick/maternity/paternity pay. The other types of benefits are non-mandatory, that is at the discretion of the employer, and include private medical insurance, free or subsidised housing, car allowances and company cars.

In the penultimate chapter, Michael Hill provides a comparative approach to examining the mixed economy of welfare. This is something that is probably less familiar to readers than the earlier focus on history, state, market, voluntary and informal welfare arrangements (Chapters 2 to 6). Hill reminds us that it is difficult to make comparisons and to generate neat typologies of different countries' welfare arrangements, but that one can at least attempt to group welfare regimes into different broad types.

In his conclusion, Martin Powell reminds us that we need to move away from thinking of welfare as being purely or mostly a state affair. Whilst one might have been able to construct, describe and analyse the provision, funding and regulation of welfare in the UK in this 'statist' way when considering the 1945-1979 post-war welfare state period, this is inadequate when considering welfare arrangements in the UK, both historically (prior to the post-war welfare state) and contemporaneously. In addition, an emphasis on 'state welfare' is also inadequate when analysing and understanding welfare arrangements in many countries across the world.

Overall, I would suggest that the book might have benefited from a tighter, shared structure employed in each chapter and also from a more frequent reference to Powell's depiction of the 32 possible welfare regimes (Table 1). Otherwise, and as is the case in this book to an extent, each chapter author provides their own structure and lens to analyse the MEW of welfare as related to their chapter topic.

The book, mindful of its potential student audience one imagines, does helpfully contain within each chapter:

- a chapter overview,
- a chapter summary,
- questions for discussion,
- suggested further reading,
- suggested electronic resources, and
- references at the end of each chapter.

In summary, the book is a clear account of how one needs to apply a mixed economy of welfare perspective in order to analyse welfare provision historically and contemporaneously, whether in the UK or globally.

I would add that the book is nicely written, which is not always something that one can say about academic texts, whether they be research-focused or written more for a student audience; and this is even more difficult to achieve in edited books, comprising chapters from a number of different contributors, however tight the brief given to them. One particularly nice metaphor is in the introductory chapter, where Powell suggests that the shift from state to informal welfare arrangements 'is more than a 'mere rearranging of the furniture in the drawing room'' (p.6); a very fine turn of phrase and depiction.

Overall, therefore, I recommend this helpful update to a very useful text on how to understand and analyse the contemporary provision of welfare, where the state arguably now dominates less than in the past, and is being replaced or supplemented: both in provision, by markets, voluntary organisations and charities as well as by informal provision; and also financially, by market, charitable and informal (personal/self) funding.

References

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The Short Guide to Health and Social Care Glasby, J., *Bristol: Policy Press, 2019*
ISBN: 978-1447350583 (pbk), £14.99, pp. xvi, 202

It took a bold author in late 2017 to write a 215 page guide to health and social care, aimed at those who might be thinking of a career in the formal services and those interested in learning about the NHS and adult social care services as voters, taxpayers and citizens. Professionals could be part of the latter group, as well as LARIA members wanting to keep up to date.

Step forward Jon Glasby, helped no doubt by having grown up in Devon and having trained as a social worker – facts he draws on in the relaxed style of the book, with occasional pointed anecdotes. He also refers to his own earlier publications frequently, though not exclusively. This is not a dry guide, though the style can be bland – and it results in an easier read than most textbooks would provide. At the same time the references are well informed, to websites such as that of the King's Fund, which are frequently updated. These in themselves reflect the skew implicit in the title of the book.

Adult social care is an adjunct to NHS formal health care – and children's social care is totally excluded as it is the subject of another book in the same series. So although global and specific figures on staff numbers in the NHS can be referred to by Glasby, data provided and trends identified, the equivalent in social care is only at a general level – no numbers of social workers, for example working in adult social care, only the broad statistics can be cited from Skills for Care sources. This is not a criticism of the book, though more could have been drawn from the limited sources available – notably the Care Quality Commission, whose (annual) State of Social Care report is the only citation from this source.

The book's strengths are manifold. There is an explicit England focus, but acknowledgement is given to intra-UK differences, and sources are cited for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, with specific discussion of the Scottish policy on free personal care to people in residential and nursing homes. Indeed, the reluctance of English policy makers to learn from experience elsewhere in the UK is mentioned, though not explored, in contrast to the readiness to look to the USA, Australia and New Zealand. Another strength is the array of text boxes: Concepts and debates, Facts and figures, Key sources and, most numerous and vivid, Voices of experience. These boxes are usefully listed on pages v-vi.

Weaknesses are few. The NHS Confederation is quoted, but is absent from the Index, as is Skills for Care – though the latter makes it into the references. The Commonwealth Fund comparative international rating overall of the NHS as best is quoted from, but not the rating of tenth in outcomes (out of 10 countries) from the same source. The Local Government Ombudsman is absent, despite receiving 3106 adult social care complaints and enquiries in 2017-8 and upholding 62% of them – both trends being upwards since 2010. The views of the regulator, the Care Quality Commission, on Adult Social Care are given in two paragraphs, compared with four quoting its view on the NHS and a further four paragraphs on the experience of a GP practice being inspected.

The Introduction provides basic statistics on both the NHS and adult social care, in four pages. The first chapter covers the history and structure of both, in 22 pages. Social services departments receive two sentences, compared with two pages describing the UK political system as if for an uninformed foreign visitor.

Chapter 2, the longest in the book, covers the differences in funding approaches to the NHS and adult social care, the split between purchasing and providing services, the implications of commissioning and a mixed economy of care, the impact of austerity (9 pages) plus the financial aspects of controversies over paying for long-term care and over the use of personal budgets. The references are wide-ranging but have minimal annotation. Checks on the personalisation references indicate they can be very dated – 2015 is a future date on In Control's website in a glossary, and there is only one item of news so far in 2019 on the same website; but the Sheffield-

based Centre for Welfare Reform, also referenced, has a very up to date website and frequent publications available.

Chapter 3, on organising health and social care is shorter, offers a critique of structural reorganisations as solutions to service tensions, explores mental health as distinct from physical health, health care, social care and partnership working and integration. The latter is both a policy objective and has not been achieved in full anywhere. (The text does not contain the word chimera.)

The second and shorter part of the book is also of three chapters, headed People and Practice, and has an emphasis on health professions and culture. Chapter 4 discusses concepts of health and wellbeing, contrasting well-meaning legislation, such as the 2014 Care Act, with the reality at ground level of financially constrained local government. This is the chapter that also discusses health inequalities, social construction in everyday life, and a social model of disability (as contrasted with a medical model). Drawing on his personal experiences while training as a social worker Glasby presents six examples of services being offered inappropriately, based on false or outdated assumptions about those the services were intended for. While these resonate, there is no comment on whether the services changed if the assumptions were challenged, or whether such services might just have ceased. User involvement and independent living are discussed in the chapter, but references are minimal. None is evaluative and only one is to a publication of Glasby's.

Being a Professional (Chapter 5) is explicitly for those thinking of a career in health and social care, primarily in the NHS, in nursing, or where ethical issues of principle are likely to arise. Chapter 6, on delivering care, addresses realities in management, the different perspectives of patients and managers, and new 'vanguard' models of health care. The adult social care element is a promotional page from Skills for Care. On job satisfaction and stress, Glasby points out that though there are data on turnover, vacancies and sickness rates, the social care system is essentially local and there are less systematic data on morale – compared with the findings of a regular Workforce survey of NHS staff. A short section on Brexit and the international make-up of health and social care staff now appears flawed because of large differences between the quoted estimated numbers provided by Independent Age and the analyses of Skills for Care, the ostensible source of the same data on the national origins of members of the social care workforce. Who said analysts were unnecessary? Certainly not Jon Glasby, whose boldness and personal commitment outweigh the limits of his brief, and results in a stimulating and useful short guide.

References

Review of Adult Social Care Complaints 2017-8 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, November 2018.

Paul Dolan

Reviews Editor

Honest Dialogue: Presence, Common Sense and Boundaries when You Want to Help Someone Falk, B., London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2017
 ISBN: 978-1785923531 (pbk), £9.99, pp. 120

I Can Beat Anorexia: Finding the Motivation, Confidence and Skills to Recover and Avoid Relapse Davies, N., London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2017
 ISBN: 978-1785921872 (pbk), £13.99, pp. 160

Pity the practitioner professional seeking to guide someone with eating disorders. Literature varies from the preachy to the drily clinical, with self-help the current order of the day. Perhaps this approach is now realistic, for the times we are in, reflecting being target-focussed, time-managed and cost-driven; but it must also be confusing for the person concerned; and it reflects a lack of critical consensus. NICE guidance tries to fill the gap, is written both for professionals and for 'people with suspected or diagnosed eating disorders and their families and carers', but it is itself limited by what evidence is available.

The approach in the book by the Danish counsellor Bent Falk relates to the individual reflecting on their behaviours and experiences, and then allowing and encouraging them to make choices in moving forward if they decide to. The author uses his background experience in counselling to guide the practitioner in various possible ways of approaching complex topics in work with individuals in therapy. He outlines issues of resilience, burn-out, and of the personal life of the therapist as having a negative impact on therapy if shared in too much detail. His approach also allows the individual a way of acknowledging past events: not dismissing them, but also not continuing to battle with the pain and constant misery that they cause. This choice is offered to the person: if they want to continue in the past or to move forward with change, as in Chapter 15, headed 'Forgiving does not undo the done'.

The approach is often open or extremely non-judgmental: for example, 'Explanation is no comfort'. For the client or the patient to reach this "acceptance", or for a helping "lay individual" to achieve this, can take a possibly significant period of time and of work. The approach of this book thus comes emphatically from a stance that does not judge our own or others' situations. Following this approach requires practice and a set of skills. Falk appears to have a grounded set of skills based, as he believes, on his background life experiences and his own faith in religion, which is evident throughout. Not all patients, clients or therapists will hold these beliefs or have the same set of skills.

In my own practice, and often working with complex individuals, it is important to set clear goals and boundaries, allowing each person (therapist and client) to know that there are treatment expectations and limitations. It is an expectation that we *both* do not judge each other: being non-judgmental is therefore a two-way process (within acknowledged risk or safeguarding boundaries) within types of therapy. Falk seems to take a non-judgmental stance to its extreme limits, as with 'helping is not always giving advice'. He implements change via a questioning style rather than sharing his own opinions. This therefore may beg the question: when does a person learn or implement meaningful changes, cope with others having opinions, and gain an understanding of other people's limitations?

Dialogue is clearly important in clinical practice, in gaining and maintaining the engagement of the people we work with. Falk offers advice on parameters in dialogue and overall grounded advice that is thoughtful, reflective and appropriate. Part of the detail does become over-attentive towards certain words and details, and it can appear that everything needs to be discussed. The impression is given of focussing on interrogating certain words, so as to promote reflection on communication, rather than on the quality of engagement or the relationship of the patient/client with the therapist. In theory this could be a good way of getting someone to reflect on how they communicate. However, there is still a need for them to air their feelings even if they can't express themselves in words they are wanting to use and know before they learn how to rephrase them. Consequently, they might hold back completely in sessions, and not engage at all.

In summary, Falk's approach to counselling may be thought somewhat context-specific, and no evidence is offered in the book about any general results achieved, nor indeed any failures.

The overall theme of Dr Nicola Davies's book is of a shared experience of a personalised recovery journey, focusing on anorexia. It is written from a professional's own experience, aiming to relate personally to individuals who might choose to read it, and not feel they are being patronised by someone who doesn't "really understand". Often for those working in practice this can be the feedback received: patients state that professionals do not truly know what it feels like to have anorexia, understand the battles to overcome it, and don't have the "lived experience". This book provides both a personal and professional account which offers a strong sense of realism.

The author uses a style of writing that is non-judgemental, valuing people, particularly those suffering an eating disorder. This engagement might not be something that they have experienced or often come across. It is a style that is compassionate and offers a sense of reassurance that their current experiences of what they are going through are not unusual, nor are they behaving this way to gain attention. The author continues in the same compassionate style to address very succinctly the high risks of continuing to engage in behaviours related to anorexia and their longer-term consequences, what types of eating disorder there are and how they can damage the person's short and longer term physical and mental wellbeing. Continuing with a non-judgemental approach, Davies offers a statement on what might cause anorexia: biological, psychological and social factors. This again anticipates, and rejects, the sometimes overwhelming sense that an individual might be behaving this way on purpose, associated with a sense of blame; and she suggests that there is not just one reason or issue, but a series of complex events and factors that lead to anorexia.

Highlighting signs, symptoms and behaviours does allow a person to identify what might be going on for them, understanding the reasons why they are thinking certain things or following a certain set of behaviours. For example, there is an ('over to you') exercise in identifying a problem or relating to a set of issues, put in a way that allows someone to feel a sense of understanding and validation. This is conveyed in a way that does not put demands, and so allows them to make choices. Furthermore, when exploring the types of treatment options, a grid box is used, with clear explanations and rationales for the types of treatments available, and why they might be helpful for different presentations, including the advantages and disadvantages of the different therapeutic approaches. Davies doesn't really favour one approach over another, but allows the person to consider what might be available to them; though she suggests that Cognitive Behavioural Therapy tends to be widely used. Specialist support from clinical management, in my experience, highlights the importance of weight gain alongside psychological intervention.

The author then goes on to ask the person reading the book to do an exercise about what they might require. This envisages several approaches and then gets the reader to address some of their own issues, such as eating, weight gain, purging, exercise, mood, family dynamics and moving on. The approaches and interventions that are described during these chapters are in current practice. They are thus in line with current NICE guidance: this is a CBT style, allowing people to identify and challenge behaviours, and to change them, with self-help exercises to support this. There are also elements of dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT) within the book that would help address emotional regulation for individuals in distress. DBT treatment is usually used in treatment for personality disorders; but to develop an understanding of emotional regulation and to be able to tolerate distress is used in clinical practice, and it would often be essential for the patient group to have access to these practical skills. Furthermore, there is also a close link between personality disorders and disordered eating.

This book too envisages for individuals a choice of whether they are ready to consider a recovery journey. Including many self-help questions and exercises makes it very interactive, with more detail than you first realise. This would therefore be a useful stepping-stone for an individual waiting for assessment or treatment, or unsure whether they are ready to start their response to anorexia along with a professional, and thus require further practical information before they envisage a long-term treatment programme.

However, I would also recommend professional colleagues to advise prospective clients to study what they can, especially if they may be waiting for an initial appointment.

This author, like Falk, explicitly puts the responsibility for actions and exercises on the person engaging with the book. For this reviewer such self-help can be a useful mechanism for the person using the service or for someone who might be suspected of having an eating disorder. It can also allow the professional to assess engagement and motivation to explore future interventions, such as CBT, and/or psychological treatment. If activities are worked on in self-help self-guided work this can allow both the professional and the person using the service to build on a clinical formulation, and to implement this in relation to goals for further treatment when this is required.

However, this is something of an aspiration. There can be successful reflective practice: for the person to identify that changes might need to be made in how they are currently living, and to limit harm they are causing themselves – gaining insight but also requiring some insight. This does mean that they will need to agree, consent and work to complete the process, which is often problematic, especially if motivation or insight is limited or transient, and whether or not they have used these useful books as aids.

References

NICE Guideline [NG 69] Eating Disorders: Recognition and Treatment, May 2017.

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