Spirituality and social care contributing to personal and community well-being
Nash, M. and Stewart, B. (eds) (2002) Jessica Kingsley Publishers, £15.95, paperback 256pp.

The content of this book comes from social work academics and from health and social care practitioners in New Zealand and North America. I will not claim to be an expert on spirituality and it is many years since I have been a practising social worker. However the subject matter being not only a serious one but also one that I thought unlikely to be covered in depth appealed to me. The book is one of a series on spirituality in the helping professions and with different user groups and life stages. It has proved an interesting if on occasions a frustrating read.

After an introduction the book is divided into two parts. The first entitled 'Mapping the Territory' looks at some theoretical issues about spirituality. The second called 'Walking the Talk' is subdivided into two sections, one of which looks at spirituality and social care with an emphasis on the personal stance of the practitioner. The other looks at the application of theory to practice and different intervention styles. The first section makes the important distinction between spirituality and religion. It defines spirituality as one's basic nature and the process of finding meanings and purpose to life. In the first chapter, Consedine looks at the importance of spirituality from a radical and contemporary perspective, commenting on issues such as the protection of human rights and sustainability. Stewart, in the second chapter in this section, describes the re-emergence of an academic and clinical interest in spirituality. He emphasises the need to be sensitive to spirituality in a multi-faith and multi-cultural context. He notes the problem in getting some social care practitioners to recognise the importance of spirituality in their practice.

The second section, which comprises the majority of the book, looks at practical issues relating to spirituality in social care. It includes some very personal accounts of why practitioners became involved in social care and the elements of spirituality that were important in their practice. There are also chapters devoted to spirituality in the context of particular service user groups. Topics covered include social care as a vocation by Eastham and a chapter on spirituality and social work in a culturally appropriate context. This deals with the particular issues of teaching about spirituality to Maori and western students in a university in New Zealand. Stewart takes the topic of spirituality in a Maori community further in a chapter about work between young offenders and healers in the community. There are also case studies that focus on the problems of disturbed children in resolving spiritual issues in counselling, and on spirituality and work with people with disabilities in community group settings in Canada. The final chapter by Herman deals with spirituality and end of life planning.

As I said at the beginning, this book is an interesting if sometimes frustrating read. It deals with the kind of deep issues that many social care practitioners may feel they have little time and possibly little skill to deal with. As such it is worth a read. It also covers spiritual issues throughout the lifespan. While it is important to emphasise the multi-cultural elements of spirituality, however, many of the examples used would not be relevant to the experiences of United Kingdom social care staff and another book may need to be written to deal with the specific issues in working with, say, the Muslim community. There are also a number of very topical references to current affairs in the book that may limit its shelf life. The sources used are from a relatively

limited number of settings that is a disadvantage, and like many books written by a number of authors there is a degree of repetition in what each one has to say. Overall a book to dip into and to think about, but not the whole answer to an important topic.

Mick Bond
North Derbyshire Public Health Network