

Cambridge University Press

978-1-909-72645-1 — Spirituality and Narrative in Psychiatric Practice

Edited by Christopher C. H. Cook , Andrew Powell , Andrew Sims

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Spirituality and Narrative in Psychiatric Practice

Stories of Mind and Soul

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21 Prescot Street, London E1 8BB
<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk>

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.
ISBN 978-1-909726-45-1

Distributed in North America by Publishers Storage and Shipping Company.

The views presented in this book do not necessarily reflect those of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, and the publishers are not responsible for any error of omission or fact.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists is a charity registered in England and Wales (228636) and in Scotland (SC038369).

Printed by Bell & Bain Limited, Glasgow, UK.

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Foreword

I read this book with fascination and interest, and it confirmed my feeling that storytelling is central to psychiatric practice, alongside a deep respect for the patient's own spiritual journey. Two contemporary themes have been employed by the editors to enable psychiatrists better to understand – and therefore be more effective in the treatment of – their patients. First, the spiritual and religious concerns of patients, after years of neglect by psychiatry, have now been accepted as an integral part of psychiatric assessment and care. Second, there has been much recent interest from many quarters, including psychiatry, in the nature and application of narrative – what it is, how it affects the relationship with, and between, our patients, and how it makes for better treatment. These dual themes are maintained throughout this book, which is written for mental health professionals, hospital chaplains and others interested in the relationship of mental health to spirituality. The practical rather than theoretical is underscored, emphasising how users, carers and relatives can all enlist spirituality and narrative for their well-being.

The fourteen chapters range widely over different areas of psychiatric practice and theoretical viewpoint. Most are written by psychiatrists whose primary role has been the care of patients. Transcultural psychiatry is shown to be intimately involved with both narrative and the person's spiritual and religious convictions. Descriptive psychopathology depends entirely on the patient's story, which often includes their spiritual and religious understanding. Psychotherapy is greatly enriched by taking into account the spiritual aspects of life; story is pre-eminent, with narrative an essential aspect of therapy. Other chapters discuss the core psychiatric problems of depression, anxiety, psychosis, psychiatry of old age and mentally ill offenders, in all of which the interweaving themes of narrative and spirituality are prominent. There are moving stories from both a service user and from people seeking help from a mental health chaplain that show the significance of their beliefs in aiding the recovery process. Each of the chapter authors make the case for the significance of spirituality and narrative in their area of mental healthcare and in the concluding chapter,

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FOREWORD

which reviews the book as a whole, the editors summarise the clinical need for taking into account both story and personal spirituality.

I am pleased to commend this book most warmly, and I trust that it will play its part in affirming a spirituality of listening as central to the delivery of good psychiatric practice.

Baroness Sheila Hollins

Past President of the Royal College of Psychiatrists

Preface

Spirituality and Psychiatry was published by RCPsych Publications in 2009. As editors of that volume, we have been gratified to note its warm reception and that the book was felt to have made a constructive contribution to the debate about the place of spirituality in contemporary clinical practice. So why, 6 years on, might it be timely for a further volume on the topic?

First, we are aware that there were gaps and omissions in *Spirituality and Psychiatry*. For example, it did not have much to say about affective disorders or about forensic psychiatry, and it did not have an author who wrote as an identified user of mental health services.

Second, while *Spirituality and Psychiatry* sought to be relevant to clinical practice and included a series of case histories, we realised in the course of our work as editors that it presented more questions than answers in relation to good practice in this newly developing field. Issues raised by spirituality in mental healthcare continue to be the subject of controversy, and we therefore felt that a second volume, with a different approach, could helpfully further the debate.

Third, while the evidence base has continued to grow steadily over the past 6 years, an important theme to emerge concerns the management of professional and ethical boundaries relating to spirituality and faith in clinical practice. There is therefore a need for a book that is cognisant of recent research literature, but which is also anchored in the realities of clinical practice. The present volume does not seek to review the recent quantitative research literature, although most contributors have made at least some reference to it. It does seek to address the realities of clinical practice in the context of the ongoing professional debate.

Fourth, for service users, spirituality and faith are closely connected with questions of relationship, transcendence and finding meaning and purpose in life – all of these questions being often best explored by way of narrative (or story). Narrative has provided an important theme in recent years in both medicine (Greenhalgh & Hurwitz, 1998; Roberts & Holmes, 1999; Engel et al, 2008) and theology (Loughlin, 1999). Yet to our knowledge, narrative has not been employed as a framework for

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exploring the importance and challenge of spirituality and religion in clinical psychiatric practice.

This book is intended to ground the abstract concept of spirituality in day-to-day clinical work, drawing on case illustrations to show how spiritual concerns/difficulties impact on, or can be included in, a range of treatment options. We have striven to be alert to the current controversies in this field, while using narrative as a tool for exploring the ethical and professional dilemmas that are raised.

As with *Spirituality and Psychiatry*, the list of authors contributing to this volume reveals a predominance of psychiatrists. We are conscious that we are writing within the profession for colleagues who want to know how other psychiatrists approach these matters, and we explicitly hope to exert a positive influence on psychiatric practice. However, we also have a wider readership in mind, and have invited and received valued contributions from service users, chaplains and clinical psychologists. Some of the contributing psychiatrists have further expert knowledge of anthropology, psychotherapy and theology, enriching the overall account that is provided here – a breadth of input that we hope will additionally appeal to a multi-professional and lay readership.

After opening with an introductory chapter on narrative in psychiatry, theology and spirituality, the chapters explore a range of perspectives on narrative, taking into account the identity of the narrator, the content of the narrative, the therapeutic aim and, not least, the interpretive skills required of the listener (especially the clinician as listener to the narrative of the patient). Chapter 2 considers how culture influences both the narrative related by the narrator and the frame of interpretation required of the listener. Chapter 3 examines how spiritual/religious experience and psychopathology may both be identified within the clinical narrative. Chapter 4 reveals the attentive presence of the clinician as an important, potentially therapeutic aid to the relating of ‘narratives of the soul’. In Chapter 5, narrative is presented as a medium within which positive and negative spiritual coping skills can be identified.

In Chapters 6 to 10, different narrative themes are in turn addressed, specifically those of joy and sorrow (in affective disorder), fear and anxiety, transgression and offending (in forensic psychiatry), and experience of psychosis. The different perspectives presented here – by clinicians and patients, and by those who might not consider themselves to be suffering from any psychiatric illness – reveal that narrative can be an important medium of presentation of psychopathology, a means of therapy, a place of finding meaning and a source of healing.

Chapters 11 and 12 present the contrasting accounts of a mental health chaplain for whom the Divine story is intimately reflected in the human story, and a psychiatrist who, as an ‘agnostic atheist’, recognises nonetheless how spiritual themes are woven into the fabric of dynamic psychotherapy.

These chapters demonstrate that in the telling of spiritual stories, while religion is important for some people, for others a non-religious perspective is to be preferred.

Chapter 13 is devoted to themes of loss and advancing age, and thus to the narratives of older people. Finally, in Chapter 14 we have sought to draw out some of the themes that emerge from the book, and especially the important parts played by beginnings and endings.

We hope that this book may play a part in furthering the telling of all kinds of stories of mind and soul, and that clinicians will feel similarly encouraged to pay close attention to such stories in the best interests of psychiatric practice.

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