

## BOOK REVIEWS / COMPTES RENDUS

### **Community Mental Health in Canada: Theory, Policy and Practice**

*By Simon Davis*

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Those of us who live in central Canada and think that Ontario is the centre of the community mental health universe, and the vortex of policy development, should be pleasantly surprised to read this comprehensive tome from Simon Davis and the University of British Columbia Press. This book developed out of a semester course that Davis taught to undergraduates, potential practitioners of community mental health. He presents a variety of perspectives on biopsychosocial factors, mental disorders, stakeholders, mental health systems, policy, criminal justice issues, legal and ethical issues—to name a few of the meatier subjects the book tackles.

The content is based on the author's experiences as a case manager, administrator, and researcher in a large, multisite community mental health centre. One of the strengths of the book is that Davis provides a variety of perspectives on various issues. He also makes good use of graphic text boxes throughout the book to highlight certain points.

Chapters 1 to 3 provide a wealth of information on mental disorders, beginning with the impact of psychiatric disorders. The second chapter explores models of mental illness from three perspectives: biological determinants, sociogenics, and the stress vulnerability perspective, which combines the first two. There is also a good review of the origins and impact of stigma, including the role that mental health professionals play in promoting stigma through "clinical pessimism." Chapter 3 contains an etiology of mental disorders, including posttraumatic stress disorder. Concurrent disorders are covered, but there is no mention of dual diagnosis.

Chapter 4 reviews the perspectives of the various stakeholders, beginning with mental health professionals—psychiatrists, family physicians, nurses, occupational therapists, recreation and leisure therapists. Davis notes that social workers often work as case managers, which appears to be at variance with the variety of roles they play. Davis uses the Canadian Medical Association guidelines for physician practice to surface the tension between paternalism and empowerment in the doctor-patient relationship. He makes excellent use of a text box to explore issues of client confidentiality, citing *Smith vs. Jones 1999*, which established the legal test for disclosure based on the criteria of risk, serious harm, and imminence.

The chapter also reviews client perspectives on the mental health system. Davis observes the tensions between the critical and accepting viewpoints related to mental illness and treatment, but provides no commentary on the ups and downs of the consumer/survivor movement in Canada. He notes that the relationship between families and the mental health system has been characterized by ambivalence and mistrust, and effectively uses a text box to illustrate family theories about schizophrenia.

In the section on government policy-makers, Davis suggests that the key issues before them are legislation about control of patients (mental health acts), funding, and cost containment. This analysis could be strengthened by a review of federal/provincial/territorial jurisdictions and mental health reform efforts across Canada.

Chapter 5 on deinstitutionalization and regionalization begins with a good review of the history of the asylum movement. Davis notes that “lunatics” made up 20% of the poorhouse population in the 1840s, yet he fails to mention the fact that people with mental illness now make up at least 33% of the homeless/shelter population—a statistic that suggests we haven’t made much progress, despite the rhetoric about mental health reform over the last 160 years.

Davis reviews the closure of over 28,000 psychiatric beds across the country between 1960 and 1976, and notes that while public support of civil rights enabled deinstitutionalization, an attitude of Nimbyism (“not in my backyard”) has had a negative impact on achieving a community-focused system. He comments that regionalized health-governance structures are supposed to promote integration, but we have to wait until chapter 7 to find out that regionalization has not resulted in more comprehensive or coordinated services.

Chapter 6 presents an overview of best practices, including an easy-to-understand description of the hierarchy of evidence. There is reference to consumer contributions to the knowledge base, but the chapter could be more comprehensive with links to and descriptions of repositories of best or promising practices such as the Center for Mental Health Services in the United States, the Canadian federal government Transition Fund reports, Health Canada reports on best practices, and Ontario’s Community Mental Health Evaluation Initiative.

Chapter 7 describes types of community mental health services, such as intensive case management, assertive community treatment (ACT) shared care, early psychosis intervention, mobile crisis intervention, concurrent disorders treatment, and telepsychiatry. This chapter could have been combined with chapter 12, which covers rehabilitation and recovery services.

Chapters 8 and 9 address housing supports and the interface with the criminal justice system. Chapter 10, which reviews the science of treatment and the role of medication, would be more useful following chapter 3 on mental disorders. The same is true for chapter 12, which reviews counselling and support approaches and includes good descriptions of cognitive behavioural therapy and dialectical behavioural therapy.

Legal and ethical issues are discussed in chapter 13. It includes a comparative analysis of provincial mental health acts as well as a review of court cases regarding treatment refusal. Conditional leaves and community treatment orders (CTOs) are covered, in addition to competency and guardian-

ship. In a section on ethical decision making, Davis asserts that ACT teams pose ethical challenges for practitioners, while acknowledging the efficacy of the program. He raises the issue of client coercion in relation to ACT and CTOs, and he does not position these services as less restrictive alternatives to involuntary or repeated hospitalization. This may be an area where academic rigor is sacrificed on the altar of his personal values, which along with John Stuart Mill, whom he cites, appear to be in opposition to the infantilization caused by the exercise of state (or professional) power over the individual.

In chapter 14, Davis takes a comprehensive look at diversity and cultural competency issues, and reviews barriers to providing culturally competent services. Unfortunately, no examples of ethno-specific services are given, despite a growing literature on the subject in the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada.

Chapter 15 summarizes some of the future challenges community mental health practitioners will face, such as the competition with acute care for resources in a regionalized health care environment, as well as the tensions around resource allocation for services to people with serious mental illness and those with mild to moderate mental illness. Other challenges include the gap between best practice and services provided, and the continuing tension between the medical model and recovery-based services.

Davis has done a commendable job in providing a thorough orientation to the variety of issues and challenges involved in delivering community mental health services in Canada. While some sections of the book could be strengthened, *Community Mental Health in Canada* will provide students and clinicians with a good resource for study and practice.