

## LIVING WITH THE LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF CANCER: ACKNOWLEDGING TRAUMA AND OTHER EMOTIONAL CHALLENGES

DR CORDELIA GALGUT

Jessica Kingsley Publishers, £12.99

**REVIEW BY:** Rosie Dansey MBACP (Snr Accred), counsellor and supervisor in private practice

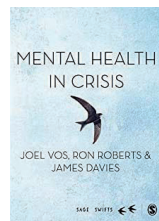
This book is written in an accessible way from a dual perspective of a psychologist, Cordelia Galgut, who had breast cancer 15 years ago and copes with the long-term effect of treatment. She identifies a gap in the literature about the long-term effects of treatment for cancer and passionately argues for more attention to be given to the issue. The coverage is comprehensive, including the impact on relationships and self-esteem; the question of whether or not to return to work; trauma; the fear of reoccurrence; survivor guilt; and the role of therapy. Secondary diagnosis is covered, though Galgut has not experienced this herself.

The author sees her audience as those living with and beyond cancer, but also their families and friends and those who work in cancer care. Yet I felt her argument is especially directed to health professionals, with a plea that they pay more attention to the emotional needs of patients. I consider this book as essential reading for anyone training or working in cancer care. Galgut's research surveyed approximately 100 people, including individuals with various cancers, healthcare professionals, and those working in related charities. Most chose to remain anonymous, confirming that this is a contentious area. Galgut commendably argues for the need for more qualitative research on cancer's long-term effects, but I question why she sees the involvement of researchers with insider knowledge as key to the generation of accurate data.

The thread running through the book is that it is a rare person who has had a cancer diagnosis who doesn't endure long-term effects of some sort, both physical and emotional, which are inseparably intertwined,

and she argues for much more acceptance and recognition of this. The book is well referenced and includes a glossary for this specialist field. Support resources are usefully listed with Macmillan Cancer Support's work adding to her theme, as does the chapter by a health journalist, Simon Crompton, on whether the male cancer experience is different.

Galgut foresees criticism for not being objective enough, but is she asking too much of the medical profession to take care of emotional needs too? As she says, there are some 'listening ears within medicine', as has been my experience. But, unlike the author, I regained quality of life following my treatment for cancer. I agree though that there is still a need for more transparency on the long-term effects of such harsh and intrusive treatments as radiotherapy, as evidenced by Mitzi's story in the Appendix. Galgut's message is powerful: telling others how you feel and standing up to those who belittle your suffering can be empowering. Passion can lead to change.



## MENTAL HEALTH IN CRISIS

JOEL VOS, RON ROBERTS AND JAMES DAVIES

Sage, £45

**REVIEW BY:** Roslyn Byfield MBACP (Accred)

This book is essential reading for counsellors and psychotherapists and should be on training curricula because many don't cover the wider mental health field, of which therapy is just one part. It's important we understand this bigger picture, to enable us to engage more effectively with the complex issues facing this sector.

The book paints a stark picture of mental healthcare and its deficits, effectively arguing that a more intelligent and tailored approach is needed than the one-size-fits-all strategy unhelpfully cultivated in recent years. It suggests that crises are related to wider social upheavals: we must now add damage inflicted by coronavirus, the rapid lifestyle-changing measures implemented to counteract it, and the inevitable knock-on socioeconomic effects.

Its central argument is that, rather than meeting the needs of individuals at different points in their lives, diagnosis and care have focused on the needs of financial and professional stakeholders, privileging biomedical responses, such as psychiatric drugs and CBT. The authors call for social justice and patient empowerment, but suggest current vested interests governing policymaking and funding militate against such goals. Cost-effectiveness has been the aim, led by a marketised NHS, where five to 10% of care is privatised, outsourced etc, but this model leads to inefficient short-termism. 'Revolving doors' carry longer-term costs; for example, when patients who find such approaches unhelpful drop out of treatment, only to return later or seek private help, if they can afford it, where they have genuine choice of treatment and therapist.

The authors challenge what has become a mental health orthodoxy unchallenged by the media - that of attributing responsibility to individuals rather than societal causes. It proposes that, as mental health is influenced by social context, assessment and treatment need to be time-sensitive and incorporate key 'domains', including the global, societal, community, daily life, emotional and biological, leading to a more holistic approach. They don't hide firm political views, for example, on the shortcomings of IAPT, where surveys have shown high numbers of staff to be experiencing burnout; 41 per cent admitting to being pressured to misrepresent treatment success statistics within a target-driven culture. 'There is clear evidence that IAPT is congruent with capitalistic values,' they write. 'Therapists need to be aware of mind manipulating trends in society and mental healthcare.'

Starting with the history of mental healthcare, chapters cover all the different aspects of the crisis: community, austerity, finance, biomedical and drug crisis, diagnosis, existential aspects, academia, and the organisational and educational crises. The book concludes with visions for the future, stressing the importance of hope, namely that structural change can be achieved quickly, so that patients and communities experience agency, security, connection, meaning and trust. Time will tell whether this proves realistic.