



The psychological impact of breast cancer: a psychologist's insights as a patient

Cordelia Galgut

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This book gives a first person view of what being a patient going through diagnosis, treatment, and prognosis of breast cancer can be like. It needs to be stressed that this is one woman's experience, though she does make reference to other people she knows who have been through a similar experience, and their quotes are littered throughout the book. Also the book contains the story of a consultant radiologist's journey through breast reconstruction. Galgut gives a human (as opposed to medical) description of her journey through the medical system as a patient – though she recognises that throughout this she was never 'just' a patient, but always had the thinking professional part of her present as well, much to the chagrin of some of her doctors.

Although this is her unique story, Galgut also makes the point that there is a commonality between women with a diagnosis of breast cancer and she comments on reports of a lot of women undergoing similar feelings and experiences, although it might have been nice to see more evidence of this in the book. Each chapter ends with a summary of what Galgut found had helped her, what didn't help her, and what would have helped.

Because it is, by and large, a very personal story, and because of her background, training and personal

understanding, Galgut has been able to analyse the impact the breast cancer has had on her psychologically as well as physically and a cumulative combination of both. One particularly thought-provoking chapter is 'Working Through Breast Cancer', in which the author clearly illustrates her thought processes and the ethical arguments both for and against her continuing to work as she did throughout her illness, taking time out only occasionally when she physically needed to, and how she informed her clients of this. This is potentially food for thought for any therapist facing personal difficulties and needing to make similar ethical decisions about whether to take time out from client work.

This book is at times heartening, and at times, highly distressing, for example, to see that even in our enlightened times, attitudes about age and sexuality can still impact on the care which someone in this situation may receive. This is a good book to read as a therapist. I now feel I have a deeper understanding of the kinds of issues which may be impacting on people with breast cancer diagnoses, and how they may be feeling because of this.

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