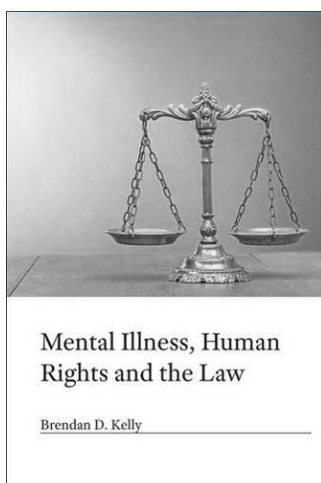


However, the strengths of scope and relevance to many are also the book's weaknesses. This is a concise handbook, not a definitive textbook. Its breadth inevitably leads to a lack of depth. I doubt the reader would significantly change their clinical practice on the basis of this text alone. Each chapter is a whistle-stop tour, covering so much that you are left unsure of which key message to take away. The book is a starting point, highlighting areas for future reading and providing reference lists to support this.

This book promotes itself as the first handbook devoted to on-call geriatric psychiatry. It should be regarded as a handbook for all health professionals involved in the care of older adults.

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Mental Illness, Human Rights and the Law

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Mental Illness, Human Rights and the Law

Brendan D. Kelly

This book is different from other books on mental health law. First, it gives an overview of the four mental health acts in force in the UK and Ireland. Second, it assesses the degree to which

these Acts comply with a number of international human rights standards, specifically the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the controversial UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Third, there is a description of more philosophical approaches to human rights. The book addresses questions such as why, despite their large numbers, people who suffer from mental illnesses have so little political power. Finally, and unusually for this type of text, the author expresses his personal opinions about the legislation.

I would be astonished if anyone could read this book and not learn something both new and thought-provoking. I learnt, for example, that President Roosevelt (in 1941) talked about 'four essential human freedoms', two of which, in my view, remain highly pertinent in relation to people with a mental illness (details are in the book). It had never occurred to me that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations 1948), which I think excellent, has been criticised because it fails, for example, to include 'the right to refuse to kill', i.e. to be a conscientious objector, or the right to a clean environment.

Discussion of the four Acts covers many issues, in addition to ECHR and CRPD compliance, such as is dignity a human right and should mental health law include positive obligations on public bodies to provide services? Then, as mentioned, there are personal opinions. In the Mental Capacity Act for England and Wales the person must be able to 'use or weigh' the information. The Northern Ireland Mental Capacity Act adds 'appreciation' of the information to that. The author doubts the latter adds anything. Of the 2007 changes to the 1983 England and Wales Act, the author states: 'the legislation demonstrated strong overall potential to advance rights'. Would everyone agree?

Despite the lack of discussion as to whether or not the Acts may cause significant harm (my hobby horse) and that the author's opinion about the Northern Ireland Act is just wrong (my opinion), this is a very informative and stimulating book which I highly recommend for all mental health professionals.

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