



columns

it interesting. ECT in the USA has faced relentless opposition from anti-ECT groups, and there is always a temptation to combat extremism by going to the other extreme. The real challenge, of course, is to recognise legitimate concerns at both poles of opinion and to negotiate a middle course.

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The Ninth Annual Richard Finlayson Lecture: Problems Following Bereavement

By Colin Murray-Parkes.
Samaritans. 1999.
£5.00 (audiotape)

The recording was made live at the 1999 Samaritans Conference and is available as an audiotape from Maxine Carter, General Office, The Samaritans, 10 The Grove, Slough SL1 1QP. The content of the talk is excellent. Dr Murray-Parkes gives a clear and concise introduction to the types of problems that follow bereavement through death and the factors that make difficulties more likely and says a little about treatments available. He makes the point that many of the research findings can be applied to other forms of loss (Murray-Parkes & Markus, 1998). The tape really comes alive when he discusses case material. For example, a widow dreamed repeatedly of her husband falling off a cliff. With therapy she was able to change the ending of the dream so that he soared up to heaven, and the dream did not recur. The talk also includes one of the best jokes I have heard from a psychiatrist.

Sadly, the content is let down somewhat by the presentation. There is much distortion and whistling on the tape and

the background noise was distracting. The recording would certainly have benefited from editing: the turnover break came in the middle of a sentence, and two deafening bursts of applause at the end of the tape precede some unnecessary house-keeping details about the conference.

Murray-Parkes is a clear thinker and conveys his message well. This tape would be useful for general practitioners and psychiatric trainees, as well as the original audience of Samaritans.

The joke? Murray-Parkes reminded us that not all marital relationships are close. A gentleman told the speaker that he had married his landlady, "because I was fed up having to share the lavatory with all the other tenants". "Ah," said the doctor, "you had a marriage of convenience."

MURRAY-PARKES, C. & MARKUS, A. (Eds) (1998) *Coping with Loss*. London: BMJ Books.

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Speaking our minds – Personal Reflections from Individuals with Alzheimer's

By Lisa Snyder.
New York: W. H. Freeman & Co.
1999. 157 pp. £15.95 (hb)
ISBN: 0-7167-324-6

Although much has been written about the clinical and scientific aspects of Alzheimer's disease, one side of the story remains largely untold – the subjective experience of those who have the illness. This book addresses this important issue. The author, a clinical social worker from the Alzheimer's disease Research Centre at the University of California, has recorded a series of interviews with individuals affected by Alzheimer's disease.

Seven people eloquently relate their personal journey through the illness, covering issues such as their early symptoms, how they were told their diagnosis, how they have adapted their lives to cope with their limitations, what effect it has had on their families and what their hopes and fears are for their futures. The narrative is part poignant, part instructive, part humorous, but always compelling – I found I had to stay up one night to finish it.

The author charts the progression of illness in follow-up interviews, and it is clear she views the individuals not just as research subjects with a common illness, but a people with a wealth of life time experience. Numerous metaphors are used throughout the book that both illustrate the points made and lighten a difficult subject matter.

Though it does not claim to be a textbook, dotted through the narrative are facts and figures about the illness. There is a section detailing recent developments in the recognition and treatment of the illness and an overview of current research. It also highlights some clinical, ethical and legal problems and includes an interesting discussion on how and when patients were told their diagnosis and the effect this had on them.

In the current climate of evidence-based medicine, it is essential not to forget the importance of individual experience. Hearing the voice of people with Alzheimer's disease deepens our understanding of the effects of the illness and helps inform our clinical practice. If you are affected by Alzheimer's professionally or personally, read this book: I think you will find it is well worth a sleepless night.

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