

Book reviews

PSYCHOTHERAPY WITH SUICIDAL PEOPLE. A PERSON-CENTERED APPROACH

Antoon A. Leenaars.

New York, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. 2004. 460 pages. ISBN 0-470-86342-0

The current volume reflects an extension of the author's long-standing clinical and research involvement in psychotherapy of suicidal patients. The author is Past President of the American Association of Suicidology and of Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention; and Editor-in-Chief of Archives of Suicide Research. In this book, he provides us with a crisis intervention for suicidal patients as well as with kind of specific psychotherapy. A stressed theme throughout the volume is the importance of psychotherapy. The author describes the general ingredients of effective psychotherapy with suicidal patients, delineates also the adjuncts such as medication, hospitalization and environmental control (chapter 19). A variety of theoretical models are presented: including unconscious processes and conflict analysis (chapter 3) with detailed discussion of transference and countertransference in therapeutic interventions, as well as interpersonal and cognitive aspects (chapter 12). In this movement toward consensus, the author expresses a view that suicide is a multidimensional event and its effective prevention is not straightforward. Helpful clinical illustrations are given with case studies presented. The final remarks summarizing every case study are adequately subtitled: "What have we learned from this case?" Case studies provided include also youth suicidal patients – one of them is Justin – a four-year-old boy whose mother often talked about hanging herself (chapter 13), and some of the pictures drawn by this child are presented.

In addition to evaluating the methods helpful in understanding and treating patients, the book also contains an invaluable review of what is known about suicide both theoretically and empirically, like wide range of different rating sheets and empirical research data. The appendix to chapter 20 is a guide for suicide prediction (by the author). Discourse analysis of Sylvia Plath famous last poems and the studies of suicidal notes are additional suicidological issues described. Numerous references (more than 600) include more than 60 Leenaars' own papers on suicide and related issues. The position of expert witness in legal suicide-related cases entitled the author to present his own original view on ethical and legal issues in chapter 21.

Antoon Leenaars final conclusion is "There are research-based practices. Suicide can be prevented." The conclusion of the reviewer is also clear: if a practitioner wants to be informed by research on suicide and stay close to parallel clinical reality, huge amount of material is to be read and this book appears to be a convenient "abbreviated" solution. The volume is unique in its approach to the issue of suicide and development of empirically informed interventions. The only discomfort for the reader is that the book is undoubtedly spacious (460 pages).

Reviewed by Jerzy A. Sobański, M.D., Dr.Sc.

That what happens to the therapist – pregnancy, illness, divorce etc. may obviously

become visible to his/her patients. Unintentionally or intentionally we become transparent, and consequently the traditionally recommended 'blank projective screen' appears pure theoretical and actually unattainable assumption. That what we really show our patients is reality of our life events – we sneeze, have car accidents, raise children, change shoes. All this "mess" in prototypically undisclosed position of psychotherapist is widely discussed in two (a bit older) books reviewed below.

It is important to underline, that the authors do not only list therapists' disclosures, and not only comment on their consequences, they also give clinically based recommendations and case vignettes of dealing with particular situations, turning phenomenon of disclosure into more safe, controllable and useful aspect of psychotherapy process.

THE THERAPIST'S PREGNANCY. INTRUSION IN THE ANALYTIC SPACE.

Sheri Fenster, Suzanne B. Phillips, Estelle R.G. Rapoport

Hillsdale, New Jersey, The Analytic Press, Inc. 1986. 142 pages. ISBN 0-88163-190-6

The book focuses on one of the most frequent life event affecting directly both population of psychotherapists and their patients. Circa about fifty percent of the human population – pregnancy.

In this book, authors describe particular clinical situations like treatment of an adolescent girl by a pregnant therapist (Chapter 7) or supervision for a pregnant therapist (Chapter 9). Countertransference reactions (Chapters 4 and 10) received special attention. Every therapist's disclosure is believed to cause a countertransference storm in many conditions. Every patient experiences terror with upcoming separation with a mother-going-to-be, sibling rivalry, jealousy, but some homosexual patients experience – evoked by the pregnancy – rapid confrontation with sexuality, heterosexuality, "straightness" of therapist, wish to have a baby etc.

The book contains also a review of what was found about pregnancy in the group psychotherapists' functioning.

A plethora of references (more than 100) are presented: including typical psychoanalytical (Kernberg, Segal, Greenson, Winnicott, Bychowski, not forgetting Freud) and more psychobiological (e.g. report on emotional depression in pregnancy published in *Obstetrics and Gynaecology*) and focusing on psychometrics – MMPI of pregnant women.

Another discussed approach to this relatively unique therapy issue may be also empirically informed (Chapter 2 on The Fenster Study). The practical remarks include for instance: to refer fresh patients if "excessively hostile, suicidal, extremely dependent or borderline" or to set a date of therapies interruption some time earlier than delivery... (p. 60-61). The clinical case studies and especially the patients' quotations illustrate author statements brilliantly.

The index *coronat opus* with such detailed subjects as pregnancy aspect of resistance between a pregnant therapist and for supervisor, return to work, handling of gifts, borderline or acting-out patients.

As Elissa Benedek mentioned "as a pregnant therapist and as a supervisor of pregnant clinicians (...) this book brings all the relevant literature together and adds new directions to the extant material." Because of its description of women development issues (Chapter 11) the volume is very fascinating also for not married nor children bearing male psychotherapists.

Reviewed by Jerzy A. Sobański, M.D., Dr.Sc.

THERAPIST DISCLOSURE. THE USE OF SELF IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

Myron F. Weiner

Baltimore, University Park Press. 1983. 227 pages. ISBN 0-8391-1792-2

A main theme throughout the book are possible applications of a psychotherapist self (as the book is subtitled). The book is a consequence of reflection on omnipresence of therapists disclosures in everyday practice, resulting for instance from office design, therapist clothes or from therapy session cancellation.

The introductory chapters (especially Chapter 4 – General Principles of Psychotherapy Intervention) defining the role of the psychotherapist and the concept of disclosure are basic for psychotherapy freshmen.

More complicated issues are related to more complicated patients – adolescents and (as always) borderline patients (Chapter 7 and 8). What's more, the author, Professor of Psychiatry at Texas University in Dallas, points out that the reflections on therapists mistakes are published infrequently. Some of them are partial identifications of the patient with the therapist, others results from lack of “controlled spontaneity” or “enthusiastic attempts to be real to the patient” (Chapter 8 on borderline patients therapy). In M. Weiner's opinion therapists' disclosure is often inappropriate when a mental health professional wishes to have “honest, opened relationship” with patients (p.113).

As well as an practitioners, also psychotherapy researchers may find some interesting empirical data and discussions (Chapter 3), concluded that timing and context are the most important variables determining consequences of disclosures. In addition to discussing the pros and contras of therapists disclosure the author provides comments on understanding and treating patients. As a result the book contains valuable clinical remarks, becoming a very interesting “therapy manual” with more than 30 case vignettes presented.

Author and subject indexes are helpful for the reader, the subject index leads to interesting notions – e.g. carom effect – naming known phenomenon when intervention aimed at one group member has an impact on others, especially those with low ego strength.

Anyone working in the field of therapy or mental health can benefit from this book. The only uneasiness of the reviewer was that the book is relatively old (1983 is its second edition the first was 1978). However, the issues discussed proved to be still present in literature – today's therapists have to deal with inevitable self disclosures ranging from simple flue or hearing problems, through divorce, pregnancy, aging to life-threatening illness.

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