

## Book Review

**Handbook of Oncology Social Work: Psychosocial Care for People with Cancer.** Edited by Grace Christ, Carolyn Messner, and Lynn Behar. 2015. 872 pages. \$110.00. ISBN: 9780199941926.

The inaugural *Handbook of Oncology Social Work: Psychosocial Care for People with Cancer* is an audacious undertaking that brings together leading educators, clinicians, and researchers from social work, psychology, nursing, law, and spiritual care. The diversity of perspectives and international faculty adds an element of creativity that is seldom found in profession-based books. It is an erudite comprehensive book with far-reaching content for people living with cancer, families, caregivers, colleagues, and society. Anyone who aspires to effectively care for seriously ill patients, their families and caregivers, and who wants to understand the biopsychosocial impact of serious illness will find this book easy to navigate and richly rewarding. It is a must have for social workers and healthcare disciplines who provide psychosocial care for people with cancer.

Drs. Grace Christ, Carolyn Messner, and Lynn Behar are all highly credible editors and pioneers who have helped to nurture psychosocial oncology well beyond social work. They each bring extensive perspectives across settings from academia, clinical care, research, community-based services, inter-professional practice, and comprehensive cancer center settings. Their cumulative depth of experience enriches the work of all of the contributors and deepens the value of this textbook overall.

The book editors have assembled an impressive list of 160 contributors, 19 sections, and 106 chapters, resulting in a coherent narrative of the key issues in psychosocial oncology. The section editors are an excellent blend of established pioneers in the field and rising stars. The scope of the work is broad, but the attention to practical interventions and vignettes adds to the value of the chapters. The content and contributors accurately and robustly reflect the psychosocial aspects of cancer but, as expected given the intended audience, are somewhat less comprehensive on the 'bio' side for which there are existing available resources (discussed below).

Topics covered in the handbook include historical perspectives and sections that would be expected in framing the cancer experience such as cancer across the continuum of care, site-specific cancers, implementing distress

screening, and research opportunities. However, this handbook also includes a more in-depth coverage of those areas that reflect social work's unique competencies and contribution to psychosocial oncology, topics that are often underrepresented in related texts. Sociocultural and economic diversity, complex issues affecting quality of life, genetics, extensive life span reviews, tailored interventions for families, partners and caregivers, implementation of patient and family-centered care in cancer treatment programs, grief and bereavement, ethical and policy issues, care coordination and transitions across settings, professional development, and leadership are some of the key areas addressed.

It is important to note that there are chapters in this handbook on the LGBTQ community. This is one example of social work's competence and commitment to integrating knowledge of sociocultural and economic diversity and treatment of marginalized populations into psychosocial oncology practice and research. The LGBTQ communities have for much too long been overlooked and stigmatized. There is also a well-written chapter on men and prostate cancer. Given the prevalence of cancer and higher mortality rates in men, along with the fact that most healthcare providers are women, gender competence is an area that has clinical and research implications for all healthcare providers.

Social workers and other mental health professionals sometimes focus on what is behaviorally manifested at the expense of the extremely powerful and less obvious biological forces that can be used therapeutically. This reviewer would like to see these connections more comprehensively covered, especially in those areas where there are obvious biological links (genetics, geriatrics, pain, sleep, depression, anxiety, sexual identity, etc.). Strengthening this perspective can readily be addressed in subsequent editions of this rapidly evolving field.

It is striking that even a cursory review of the chapters reveals that progress made by many of the research contributors has been through personal commitment and incredible amounts of grit, perseverance, and self-motivation. There is a dearth of funding sources for social work research. Given the complexity of the settings and the high-risk populations served, the lack of research support has important implications for the health and wellbeing of patients, their families, our colleagues, and ourselves. The lack of meaningful support for social work research is especially true of the underserved, the poor, and the

minorities who are more likely to receive services from social workers.

It is extremely rare for there to be one source that provides so much evidence-based and practical information in one convenient textbook. The Handbook of Oncology Social Work: Psychosocial Care for People with Cancer is totally accessible, easy to navigate and most of all, highly focused on the practical aspects of providing compassionate expertise across the human experience. This treasure trove of information is a must-own that should always be within arm's reach.

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