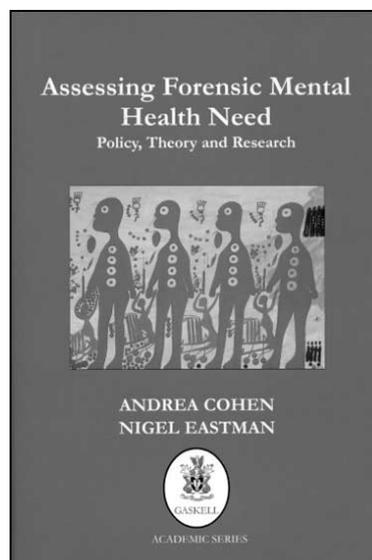




Assessing Forensic Mental Health Need. Policy, Theory and Research

By Andrea Cohen and Nigel Eastman. London: Gaskell. 2000. 228 pp. £30.00 (hb). ISBN: 1-901242-42-0



Some time ago I was asked by Gaskell if I would review the outline of a book – this book – in order to help them come to a view on possible publication. I suggested that it would have a narrow (forensic) audience, but it would be worthwhile to publish an authoritative book on needs assessment.

I was both right and wrong. This book could almost be entitled 'Everything you ever wanted to know about needs assessment, but was too afraid to ask'. I realised very early on in my reading that needs assessment was so much more complicated than I had first thought. Rationality in service planning is the goal, but at the same time it is also subjective, politically driven and resource managed. The authors offer a detailed description of needs assessment policy with an emphasis on mentally disordered offenders (MDOs) and a theoretical framework to enable the reader to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the various approaches (survey, rates under treatment, social indicator, key informant and community opinion).

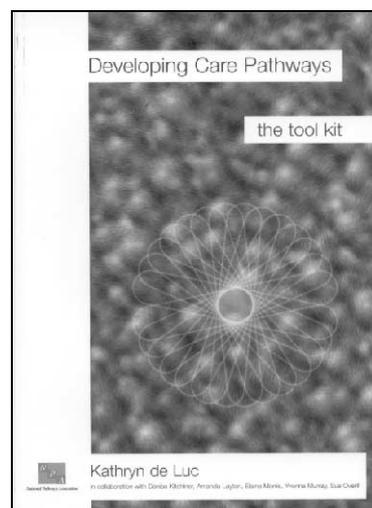
The detail and thoroughness of the reviews are impressive, but the over reliance on a historical approach makes some aspects of the book appear out of date. I was wrong in suggesting that the book would have a narrow audience. It may have – but it should not. The breadth of many of the chapters is such that I would commend it to the wider mental health constituency, in particular, general psychiatry. I did not find myself agreeing

with everything in the book. In the Survey approach chapter, the authors suggest 'if only high security hospitals provide the high level of occupational facilities that some patients require, then, even if their risk to others infers that they only require medium security, their proper placement within existing services is high security.' This confirmed for me that when one is drawn so far down the needs path, ethical judgements, for example, locking patients within category B prison type security, are not considered. But this is the point of the book – needs assessment is perhaps little more rational than other methods of service planning, and as the authors suggest, as an approach it is only as good as its assumptions and method. For MDOs the assumptions, the politics and the fears of the community complicate the whole process.

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Developing Care Pathways. The Toolkit

By Kathryn de Luc. Abingdon: Radcliffe Medical Press. 2001. 43 pp. £30.00 (sold with Handbook, pb). ISBN: 1-85775-499-9



Care pathways have been developed in many areas of medicine. Such pathways can be a helpful way of ensuring that clinicians implement good practice guidelines. They can also be helpful as a way of empowering patients with the knowledge of what treatments they can expect and within what time-frame. *Developing Care Pathways* has been written to facilitate the development of care pathways: explaining what they are and how to go about producing one.

Unfortunately, in spite of being in two volumes – a handbook and a toolkit – what has been produced is a simplistic

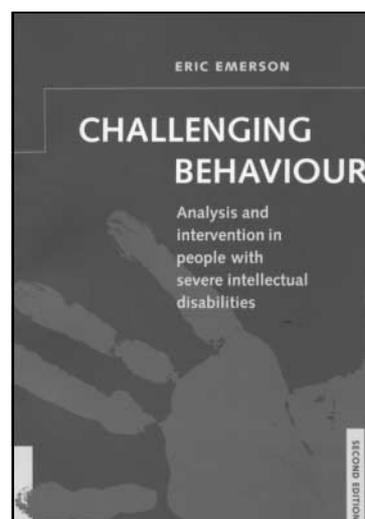
account of care pathways, long on the obvious and short on how to overcome any difficulties. The book was disappointing in two main aspects. First, there was insufficient material provided as to the evidence that care pathways actually improve the process of care. It would have been useful to have evidence both for and against the use of such pathways rather than simply seeing them as a good thing. Second, it would have been useful to have had much more information about problems that exist in implementing pathways. For example, how does one overcome clinician resistance? Is the extra paperwork that will almost inevitably be involved be justified by the result? Are care pathways completed accurately by staff? Are deficiencies in care highlighted by care pathways remedied to bring about improved patient results?

Although this book may be useful for someone who knows nothing about care pathways as an introduction to the concept, anyone who has had experience of developing their own care pathway will probably not learn anything new.

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Challenging Behaviour. Analysis and Intervention in People with Severe Intellectual Disabilities

By Eric Emerson (2nd edn). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2001. 210 pp. £29.95. ISBN: 0521-7944447.



A substantial minority of people with severe learning disabilities behave in ways that cause problems for themselves, their carers and other members of society. This is frequently a reason for referral to a psychiatrist. Challenging behaviour has become the preferred term in recent years