

## Book Review

### A piece of my mind: A psychiatrist on the couch

Gordon Parker

Gordon Parker gives hope to late bloomers everywhere. Born on April Fools day, he led a self-contained childhood, before day-dreaming through adolescence and repeatedly surprised himself at the annual medical school 'cull'. He tackled a range of creative endeavours, prior to focusing his attention on psychiatry.

He notes that as psychiatry changes, so too do the people attracted to it, and few psychiatrists have described the day to day satisfactions or their reasons for their profession's appeal. Gordon's conveys the pleasure of his intellectual challenges, noting that 'psychiatric research is so rich with potential' and that defeat only stimulates him to 'forage further'.

'A piece of my mind: A psychiatrist on the couch' is divided into three parts; a personal memoir, a passionate exploration of the war zone of depression classification systems, and a reflection on the pluralism needed in a clinical psychiatrist, and in the mental health profession in general.

He aims not to record his (many) substantive achievements or defend a personal style that, in his own words, has been described as 'zealous', 'stubborn', 'tenacious', 'bloody minded', 'territorial', or 'testy'. His book really is a call to arms to those considering, or in the process of progressing the profession, and to the community at large.

Gordon outlines his clinical and research focus that underpins the work of the Black Dog Institute; how best to classify clinical depression, the risk of 'pathologising' normal reactions to abnormal situations, identifying a disconnect between trial data and real world clinical results, and concerns about treatments being fitted to practitioners treatment modality. His work across 30 years has challenged formal classifications systems, called for the reinstatement of melancholia, and resulted in the Black Dog Institute sub-typing BDI model.

Gordon believes that collegiality is too highly valued, and pays his respects to his noisiest opponents. However, he poignantly describes the intense personal suffering that can be brought about by misdiagnosis or a 'meandering' therapeutic approach. The tragic consequences of which really 'pushes his buttons'.

His own action-oriented style, and time spent considering surgery as career, instilled in him a sense of urgency and an attitude of 'never giving up' on people. He talks of the resilience he observes in everyday practice and the honour of being a 'a privileged guest' to people's lives.

This book is not about setting the record straight, but about encouraging and entrusting others with these life altering, and life preserving, responsibilities.

Review by Stephanie Website, Consumer Educator