Review


Reviewed by: Revd Canon Dr Marion Chatterley. Team Priest, St Mary’s Cathedral, Edinburgh and Chaplain to people living with HIV. St Mary’s Cathedral, Palmerston Place, Edinburgh, EH12 5AW, UK
Email: marion@cathedral.net

Briana MacWilliam describes herself as a Creative Arts Therapist, Educator and Reiki Practitioner. She has a YouTube channel within which she appears to be mostly interested in issues relating to attachment. This book, which covers a wider area of interest, is aimed primarily at art therapists.

The book is laid out in three distinct sections – complicated grief, attachment and art therapy. The first two sections are relevant and readily accessible for healthcare chaplains; section three is less useful for those who have no training in the use of art within therapeutic relationships.

In the opening section, “Complicated Grief”, the editor has a markedly sensitive attitude towards her readers. She takes great care to ensure that the reader has considered their personal circumstances and is prepared for any emotional, psychological or spiritual response that may arise.

One strength of this book is in its exploration of the nature of grief. MacWilliam offers helpful descriptions of the grieving process and clarifies the place and importance of attachment. In particular, I found the Chapter on “Complicated Grief” (co-authored with Dina Schapiro) to be comprehensive and helpful. It makes useful connections between complicated grief responses and attachment theory. There is some exploration of the impact of grieving on spirituality, making a distinction between spiritual and religious responses. This short section may be instructive for some, but lacks depth for those whose practice is rooted within a faith tradition.

The chapter on “Concepts in Treatment” explores and critiques the Kübler-Ross model as it has come to be understood within contemporary culture, and offers Patient and Family Centred Care (PFCC) as a
gold-standard model for interventions. This model, which has its roots in Rogerian theory, then forms the base from which art therapy might be offered.

The second section, “Self-studies”, comprises a number of reflexive chapters which explore the process and impact of image making for a number of professionals. Each chapter includes a “how to” step-by-step guide to engaging with the creative technique covered within that chapter. These are aimed primarily at therapists and assume a pre-existing relationship with the client/patient. Some, with careful adaptation, may be useful in long-term healthcare settings or in end-of-life care. They may also be useful tools for use within a peer supervision or reflective practice group. In particular, a support group that has become “tired” may benefit greatly from engagement with one (or more) of these techniques.

The final section of the book is a series of case studies, each detailing the process and progression of a piece of work with an individual or family group. Again, there are step-by-step “how to” instructions which I doubt would be useful for many readers of this journal.

The book is well produced, including several colour plates of work that has been made within the sessions that are described. The spiritual aspects of the work are not highlighted, but the images themselves say something profound about the human condition and the depth of healing that can occur.

This is a useful resource for those who are able to engage in longer-term pieces of work. Its real benefit may, however, be for chaplains themselves. The book could be used both individually and within a group setting and might be a useful catalyst for practice based reflection.