

Review

Sam Guglani, *Histories*. London: Riverrun, 2018, 128 pp. (Pbk). ISBN: 978-1-78648-381-2, £8.99.

Reviewed by: Revd Fran Kissack, Chaplain, Royal Hallamshire Hospital, Glossop Road, Sheffield, S10 2JF, UK
Email: fran.kissack@sth.nhs.uk

If you want to know about hospital life there are a number of recent accounts you can read. The stories of junior doctors, neurosurgeons and paramedics have hit the bestseller lists in recent years. Patients too have given powerful accounts of life with illness. These factual accounts are fascinating, but are confined to a single point of view. Sam Guglani, in his book *Histories*, draws a picture of life across a single hospital, weaving together the strands of various lives in a fiction which is one of the most truthful books I have read in a long time. Guglani is a doctor, a Consultant Clinical Oncologist, who is also a poet and a writer. His writing is beautifully evocative. He describes the hospital we all know and have experienced in some way.

The characters in Guglani's short book are staff and patients. They are briefly but convincingly portrayed. Each one is needed for a complete picture of the institution. We are offered a glimpse of their lives and motivations. The author shows us what matters as each history becomes part of the whole. We meet human beings. They are domestics, porters, doctors, nurses, secretaries, students, and patients. They are anxious, fearful and weary, arrogant and confident, full of compassion and wracked with self-doubt. There is a chaplain too. Enjoy his outraged outburst, and wonder whether you would ever have found the courage, or the passion.

As the events of a week in the life of Guglani's fictional hospital play out, we find ourselves caring about the lives of his protagonists and the life of the institution they populate. His perceptive take upon hospital life is bursting with reality, from the reflective conversation of the sick consultant angry that he had been asked if he wanted CPR: "Like it was a jar of sweets up on a shelf"; the powerful, sacramental compassion of the domestic; and the humanity of the young porter who offers his suggestion for the new

hospital mission statement: "IT'S NOT ABOUT US". There's a thought. It is not about us. And yet it is. Who we are and what matters to us shape the care we give. That is one of the things this book tells us. It is a story, a history, of truth. It is an ultimately hopeful book brimming with insight. I have read it twice already. Read it, hear its questions, let it touch you and maybe it will even make a difference.