

## Review

Peter Dorward, *The Human Kind: A Doctor's Stories from the Heart of Medicine*. London: Green Tree, 2018, 343 pp (pbk). ISBN: 978-1-47294-394-1 £9.99; eBook ISBN: 978-1-47294-391-0; epub ISBN: 978-1-47294-392-7.

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Dr Peter Dorward, an experienced doctor and a published author of short stories, screenplays and a novel, uses his creative writing skills to present a readable account for the issues and dilemmas met daily in the GP surgery. It is written for the general reader but I think it provides a good overview of the state of healthcare in Britain and is thus useful for chaplains. By combining different individuals to create composite characters as patients and including discussions he has with trainee doctors and colleagues he covers the medical and ethical difficulties faced by GPs. The complexity of the ethical decisions is made understandable through the memorable patients he creates. The notes on sources give further reading for those interested in a particular topic.

Each chapter covers a different situation beginning with a patient who wants assistance to die. Here he explores four questions doctors should ask the dying before showing the difficulty with his patient when such conversations happen. From this he discusses issues around assisted dying. Next, he moves to a child with severe learning disabilities and complications and a very caring and protective mother. In this chapter he raises issues around caring more for one body than another while in a later chapter, where the issue is psychosis or not, he addresses the idea of personhood.

When dealing with “functional symptoms” he sits in on a clinic run by a diagnostician, a consultant with an open mind who has an hour with each patient. This comes in a story about a talented young man who after a simple accident seems to move from one pain to another. Dorward is honest about his own prejudices and difficulties in being compassionate and understanding with drug addicts and other people he may fear. He describes how he

cope with those who regularly self-harm and want more Valium. Then he moves to a teaching session with medical students reading an article on the Resignation Syndrome among refugee children in Sweden while also remembering a student from 20 years before who cut herself. The focus here is on social factors involved with illness whether “ME” or poverty.

There is a chapter around depression and suicide and another where he describes his personal experience of a serious climbing accident which leads to a discussion around pain and trauma and a visit to a philosopher. There are two chapters about opiates. In the first he focuses on long-term heroin users and the second with non-specific chronic pain where he concludes that the cure for the pain of loneliness is surely a friend. This is a simple fact which is slowly gaining currency with the start of social prescribing. Dorward does not believe in God and includes one chapter where he interacts with a Christian doctor and wonders how to constantly maintain a kind manner.

The value of these stories and discussion for healthcare chaplains lie in the way that the complexity of the medical world is made not only clear and understandable for the non-professional but also shows compassion both for individual patients and for GPs coping with them. The strength of the long-term relationships which can arise between GPs and patients is clear in contrast to the usually short-term relationship that healthcare chaplains have with people in hospitals or hospices. For anyone new to healthcare chaplaincy this is a great introduction to the medical world while for those who have been around for longer the book is a reminder of the complexity of many conditions. The honesty that Dorward shares about the need for self-awareness, of one’s prejudices and fear, of the struggle to remain compassionate and kind in order to maintain a professional approach are lessons that all healthcare chaplains do well to remember.