

Book Review

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Psychiatrist in the chair: The official biography of Anthony Clare by
Brendan Kelly and Muiris Houston. Merrion Press. 2020.
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'Psychiatrist in the Chair' is a biography of one of Ireland's most well-known and influential psychiatrists Professor Anthony Clare (1942–2007). Professor Clare was renowned in Ireland and the United Kingdom for his role as a Television and Radio broadcaster, including presenting the popular BBC radio program 'In the Psychiatrist's Chair'. Professor Clare was also a prolific author and was famous for his influential book published in 1976 entitled 'Psychiatry in Dissent'.

From the first page this book captures your attention with vivid descriptions of Professor Clare's early life as a child living in Ranelagh, Dublin. There are captivating accounts of his progression through school, University training, psychiatric training, and his subsequent career as a psychiatrist, teacher, author and broadcaster. Professor Clare flourished as an orator and debater and had an exceptional ability to present persuasive and coherent arguments on a wide range of topics. The reader gets a sense of the impact Clare had in each of these roles, and of his endless energy and enthusiasm. The accounts of a very busy and influential psychiatrist are fascinating, and the personal demands resulting from such success are alluded to in the book.

The quotations scattered throughout the book from interviews with Professor Clare's friends and family provide a unique perspective on his private life. Professor Clare was a dedicated family man with seven children, and his deep devotion to his wife and children is evident in the book. There are also quotations from celebrities and other famous psychiatrists, such as Professor Sir Robin Murray and Professor Ivor Browne, which give further insights into his character and achievements.

The development of psychiatric thinking in the 20th century is another key subtheme of the book

which delivers a narrative on the progression of mental health services as they moved from an asylum based system to community based care. Professor Clare was a strong advocate for the advancement of psychiatric services during this time which was supported by the development of novel biological and psychosocial treatments in the latter half of the twentieth century. The progression of the Royal College of Psychiatrists and training standards in psychiatry also comes into sharp focus given Professor Clare's passion for ensuring high standards of training and education among psychiatrists. His role as innovator and educator was continued during his time as Clinical Director in St. Patrick's Hospital later in his career.

The book touches on many other topics including Professor Clare's wide ranging research, his media career, his world view and his clinical approach in psychiatry. Professor Clare's compassionate and humane approach as a psychiatrist is illustrated throughout, which is valuable when comparing with one's own clinical practice.

I would highly recommend this book for all clinicians with an interest in mental health. The personal story of an exceptionally talented man, coupled with the development of one of Ireland's most famous psychiatrists makes for a thoroughly fascinating read. The book provides easy reading and is likely to appeal to a wider audience with a curiosity for interesting life stories.

In essence this is a remarkable book about a remarkable human who made a major contribution to mental health services in Ireland and the United Kingdom, and whose legacy continues to influence psychiatric practice today.

Conflict of interest

JL has no conflicts of interest.

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