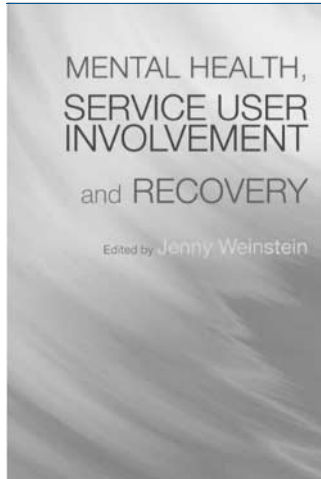


Book reviews

Edited by Allan Beveridge, Femi Oyeboode
and Rosalind Ramsay



Mental Health, Service User Involvement and Recovery

Edited by Jenny Weinstein.
Jessica Kingsley Publishers. 2009.
£19.99 (pb). 224pp.
ISBN: 9781843106883

The involvement of service users and patients in healthcare generally has gathered momentum over the past few years, so this book is timely. It covers the many different features of mental health service user involvement, from joint decision-making on personal treatment plans to service user-led research projects. About half of the chapters are about the history and policy of aspects of service user involvement, with contributions from user groups; the rest are user narratives giving examples of what in terms of participation allowed them to start on their recovery journey. The book was written as a collaborative venture between academics from London South Bank University and several groups of service users.

The book is based around the English National Health Service (NHS) mental health services and may not even fully translate to the rest of the UK, let alone further afield. The chapters I found the most interesting and informative were those on the group Advocacy in Action, the chapter on listening to young care-leavers and the one on the creative involvement of service users in the classroom. Although it never explicitly says so, the book does highlight the difference between participation as therapy and user involvement to get a project done as a co-professional with tight deadlines and limited resources. I would guess that the majority of this book was written before the start of the recession.

These days, given government policy and National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence guidelines, involving mental health service users in decisions about their own care should be a given. And if service users are involved in service redesign, engaging them early and agreeing the limits of their contribution (these are always there) is only the courteous thing to do. That we still need to be reminded about this is rather sad.

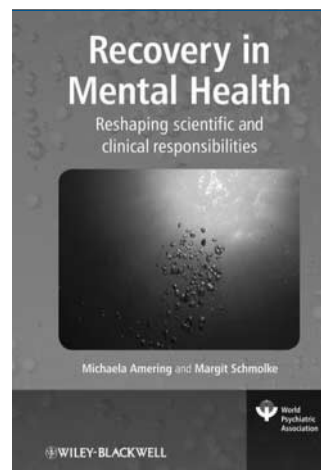
The book has some inadequacies. It assumes a high degree of knowledge of the English mental health system and, although acronyms are explained at some point in the text, anyone who is dipping in and out rather than reading through may find the mentions of SLAM (South London and Maudsley Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust), CPA (care programme approach), MIND (a mental health charity) etc., quite confusing.

This is an interesting book and I would recommend it to service users who are near the beginning of their recovery journey and to professionals who are new to working in the NHS,

especially if they have come from more corporate jobs. It is easy to read and each chapter finishes with a list of useful tips. However, it seems to say that service users always need to be treated as if they are fragile and unable to take being treated as proper equals, a view I would disagree with strongly, as would many other service users I work with.

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doi: 10.1192/bjp.bp.110.078543



Recovery in Mental Health: Reshaping Scientific and Clinical Responsibilities

By Michaela Amering
& Margit Schmolke.
Wiley. 2009.
£49.99 (hb). 280pp.
ISBN: 9780470997963

Recovery is probably the most important new direction for mental health. It represents the convergence of a number of ideas – empowerment, self-management, disability rights, social inclusion and rehabilitation – under a single heading that signals a new direction in services.

This book was originally published in German. The translation has been revised, with some new material added and references amended to reflect the English-language literature. The authors set themselves the ambitious task of providing a text that will be a useful resource not only for mental health professionals but also for professionals from other health-related areas as well as people with lived experience of mental health problems and carers. In this the book is only partially successful. There is a huge amount of information describing concepts of recovery and also examples of how the concept has been put into practice around the globe. For those with an interest and some knowledge of recovery, the book provides a treasure trove of bite-size chunks of knowledge and theory. What the book lacks, however, is a coherent sense of structure, which limits its accessibility and usefulness for readers needing a basic grounding in recovery theory and practice. For example, although chapter one, 'Recovery: basis and concepts', starts with Anthony's elegant and succinct definition of recovery, it then runs to nearly 50 pages taking in such diverse areas as political strategy, resilience and health promotion. Subsequent chapters follow a similar pattern, with wildly diverse subjects grouped together, some of which appear to have only a tenuous link to recovery concepts. The references, however, are useful and eclectic, and include a significant number of European authors, reflecting the book's German origins.

This is certainly not a book for everyone and is unlikely to bring many new converts to the ideas of the recovery model. However, for those who are already knowledgeable and enthused