

Cognitive Therapy for Challenging Problems: What to Do When the Basics Don't Work
Judith S. Beck, Guilford (www.guilford.com). August 2005, 324 pp., \$38.00, Hardcover,

A new book by Judith Beck is an eagerly awaited event. Her last book, *Cognitive Therapy: Basics and Beyond*, is an outstanding teaching text which I recommend to all my trainees. I started looking forward to the new book last year thanks to advance publicity from Guilford.

Unfortunately, my review copy did not arrive until March 6th this year! Fortunately, it was worth the wait. As soon as I started reading the book I recognized some of the features I had appreciated in the first book: the clear, readable layout and Judith's lucid, authoritative style of communication, reflecting the depth of her experience, her grasp of what the reader needs to know, and her capacity to conceptualize and articulate complex problems clearly. In his foreword to the book, Aaron Beck mentions that "after college she embarked on a successful career in special education" before making a career shift into clinical psychology. This may account in part for why she is such a particularly good educator.

Judith Beck explains in the first chapter that she wrote the book in response to repeated requests for a book that dealt with challenging problems, and that it represents what she has learned since the publication of *Cognitive Therapy: Basics and Beyond*. It is evident that a great deal of time and care has gone into preparing this second volume. Her goal in the new book is to help therapists to "state difficulties in behavioral terms, to understand relevant difficulties within a cognitive framework, and to devise strategies based on their specific conceptualization of an individual patient."

Aaron Beck observes in his foreword that he is particularly proud of Judith's first volume, *Cognitive Therapy: Basics and Beyond*, designed primarily for beginning cognitive therapists, and the present volume for advanced cognitive therapists. He says he is certain that both volumes will be a boon for therapists and patients alike.

The first chapter summarizes common reasons for problems arising within therapy, including insufficient intensity of treatment, incorrect implementation of techniques, and deeply entrenched beliefs. The importance of accurate diagnosis and formulation, overcoming difficulties in the therapeutic relationship, and setting specific behavioral goals are all emphasized.

The next two chapters focus on accurately conceptualizing patients who present challenges, either because they have multiple problems and dysfunctional beliefs, or because they have underlying personality disorders. The section on cognitive profiles of specific personality disorders helpfully highlights therapy-interfering cognitions and behaviors for each type, and provides illuminating case examples. I felt this section could have been expanded further to include strategies for responding to these challenges. While it was useful to have the problems clearly outlined, it would have been even more useful to hear about possible solutions.

The next three chapters cover developing and using the therapeutic alliance, therapeutic relationship problems, and dysfunctional therapist reactions to patients. The chapters include multiple clinical vignettes, including transcripts of sessions, to illustrate key points. They also bring work on the therapeutic relationship into the mainstream of cognitive therapy. The importance of conceptualizing problems in the therapy relationship is emphasized. The chapter on dysfunctional reactions to patients is particularly good, and to be recommended to all therapists.

The remaining chapters focus on a series of challenges in therapy: challenges in setting goals, in structuring the session, in solving problems and in homework, in identifying cognitions, in modifying thoughts and images, in modifying assumptions and in modifying core beliefs.

A particularly helpful feature of these chapters are the sections examining patients' dysfunctional beliefs about each of these topics. The chapter on challenges in setting goals has a very helpful section on patients' dysfunctional beliefs about setting goals, with therapeutic strategies for addressing them, and illustrative case examples. The chapter on challenges in solving problems and in homework has a helpful section on typical beliefs that interfere with problem solving and doing homework. The chapter on challenges in modifying thoughts and images has a couple of sections on dysfunctional beliefs that lead patients to resist modifying their thoughts during or between sessions. The chapter on challenges in modifying assumptions examines three dysfunctional assumptions that often interfere with treatment: (i) If I let myself feel bad, I'll fall apart; (ii) If I try to solve problems, I'll fail; and (iii) If I get better, my life will get worse.

It seems churlish to note that the last chapter on challenges in modifying core beliefs is slightly disappointing in that it focuses on mainstream approaches to modifying core beliefs, but relatively little space is devoted to challenges in successfully implementing this part of therapy.

Finally, there is helpful information in Appendix A about opportunities for training and supervision at the Beck Institute in Philadelphia and through the Academy of Cognitive Therapy. This book will be much appreciated by therapists working with patients with challenging problems, and is an excellent companion to *Cognitive Therapy: Basics and Beyond*.

Linette Whitehead, M. Sc.
Cotswold House, Warneford Hospital
Oxford, England