

Schizophrenia: A Guide for Families
Antony Kidman
Sydney: Biochemical and General Services
2007. 48pp. \$16.95 (paperback).

Schizophrenia is an illness that is ubiquitous, affecting approximately one percent of the population worldwide. This statistic has remained consistent for decades and has had a profound effect on the families and others who are involved with those afflicted.

While there are numerous books and resources addressing the treatment of schizophrenia, few address its impact on families, and fewer still provide practical guidance for family members to maneuver through the menagerie of variables concerning it. That is why it is important to have Antony Kidman's wonderful new book available. Compact (48 pages), but powerful, the book was designed to explain the symptoms and prognosis of the illness, together with current trends in treatment, in order to help broaden family members' scope and understanding.

Kidman begins his discussion with the term "schizophrenia," its definition and evolution. The chapter focuses on the origin of the disorder and some of the many misconceptions that accompany the label. Next, the author outlines specific symptoms, categorizing them into positive and secondary symptoms, as well as addressing causes and the stress-vulnerability model that contributes to patients' decompensation. The delineation of potential causes covers genetic, substance use, stress, and environmental circumstances. This chapter also touches lightly on types and conditions of schizophrenia, along with some organic brain etiology.

The book provides a nice overview of treatment, encompassing both pharmacology and cognitive-behavioral interventions. The perspective is underscored by a case study in which social skills training and coping mechanisms are outlined. The essential chapter on family matters addresses some of the fears and concerns held by families regarding severely ill members. Specific consideration is given to the amount of stress that family members endure and the heavy responsibility that the family carries in caring for the mentally ill. Techniques and recommendations are offered for dealing with a range of topics, from accepting positive symptoms, including delusions, to hallucinations, and the effects of illicit drug and alcohol use.

The implementation of the cognitive-behavioral model of treatment for psychotic illnesses, along with goals of the therapeutic process, form another important focal point of the discussion. The book shines in the area of supporting family members in maintaining their own healthy thinking and not allowing the disturbance of the illness to distort their perceptions of reality and the circumstances that surround them. Kidman emphasizes the necessity of having realistic expectations so that family members can accept appropriate feelings and identify irrational beliefs. The book centers on effective ways of handling the practical issues that occur during the course of the illness, as well as managing crises and the sometimes tumultuous circumstances that arise as a result of the situation.

A special section highlights family members' propensity to cope with mental illness by denigrating and blaming one another. Kidman encourages family members to maintain a sensible and balanced environment and to develop strategies for dealing with a situation that could otherwise easily erode the basic fabric of a family's existence. This short book concludes with appendices that speak to some of the common irrational beliefs that create negative feelings about psychiatrically ill family members, as well as providing forms for disputation and negative

irrational thoughts. Guidelines are presented for listing emotional support and facing reality, and a useful bibliography directs readers to resources.

This is an excellent little book that is easy to read and crafted in a style that is appealing to anyone who has a family member dealing with schizophrenia. Kidman's writing is clear and effective. He has an ability to consolidate what is a rather vast subject into something that is digestible and actually pleasurable to read.

I highly recommend this book for family members of the mentally ill, as well as mental health professionals who are seeing families who have severely mentally ill members, whether they are diagnosed with schizophrenia or another serious mental disability. Many of the coping skills outlined in this book may be helpful across a number of domains.

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