BOOK REVIEW


It is 10 years since the publication of the first edition of this work, and 2011 sadly saw the death of G. Alan Marlatt, a pioneer of the harm reduction (HR) movement. The first edition has become a standard reference for those interested in, and/or working in the field, and this second edition should prove a valuable addition. The intervening years have seen HR become more widely accepted as a mainstream treatment approach, and the first section of this work reviews the definition, principles and aims of HR with some interesting international and historical context.

The middle section addresses HR psychotherapy and offers individual chapters on a fairly comprehensive range of substances, including alcohol and a new chapter on cannabis. Alcohol is addressed in some detail, the scene being set with useful epidemiological data and historical context. A range of HR interventions from brief interventions, cognitive behavioural therapy and mindfulness-based approaches are discussed, as well as the role of pharmacotherapy within the HR context. A review of current alcohol policies, mainly from a North American perspective, addresses the benefits and limitations of current legislation, and the potential benefits of an expansion of evidence-based HR options at a population level.

The chapter on tobacco is particularly fascinating on the politics of tobacco HR, and there is extensive reference to a wide range of relevant research throughout the individual chapters which makes for an excellent resource of current knowledge.

New chapters on specific ethnic populations in North America have less direct relevance to a European reader, although there are likely common themes which may be adapted to other minority groups. Similarly, the final chapter deals specifically with US drug control policy but offers a well argued evidence-based case for the reconsideration of modern approaches to drug policy and legislation outwith the narrow tendency for prohibition and criminalization.

The tone could at times be overly evangelical for some, but the central message of the work is to encourage those with an interest or working in the field of substance misuse to consider HR principles and incorporate HR strategies into their practice in order to successfully engage a broader range of individuals in treatment and ultimately reduce the potential and actual harm experienced by the individual, and population at large, from a range of high-risk behaviours.

Dr FRANCES E.M. SKELTON M.B. Ch.B (Edin) MRCPsych, Associate Specialist in Addiction Psychiatry Kershaw Unit, Gartnavel Royal Hospital, 1055 Great Western Road, Glasgow G12 OXH, UK
frances.skelton@ggc.scot.nhs.uk

© The Author 2012. Medical Council on Alcohol and Oxford University Press. All rights reserved