Cognitive Behaviour Therapy for People with Cancer

According to the authors, Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) offers a brief, convincing, commonsense approach to the emotional problems faced by people with cancer. They are well qualified to make these statements as their clinical work and research over many years has led the way in the development and evaluation of their application of CBT principles and techniques to people with cancer and their families. They call their approach 'adjunctive psychological therapy', to emphasize the fact that it is intended to complement other aspects of cancer treatments.

Readers unfamiliar with the burgeoning literature on psychosocial aspects of cancer will find the first four chapters provide an interesting review of the cognitive approach to cancer and many of the studies that have evaluated cognitive-behavioural interventions.

The remaining 10 chapters are practically oriented. Collectively, they are a treasure trove for the neophyte as well as the experienced practitioner. Basic and advanced techniques are described clearly, and they are amply illustrated with case histories from the authors’ rich clinical experience.

The book contains a number of useful appendices, including self-report questionnaires to evaluate aspects of current coping and cancer-related concerns. There are also templates for patients to use to record their thoughts and activities between sessions.

Although one might be forgiven for assuming on the basis of the title that this book would only be about cognitive behaviour therapy, quite rightly it discusses more general aspects of the therapeutic relationship and, refreshingly, it avoids a narrow dogmatism. The reader is led sensitively through the practicalities of assessing patients for CBT and is then taken through the process of applying this therapy in clinical practice.

A useful feature of the book is that it contains chapters on more specialized areas, such as working with couples and with advanced disease. Regarding the latter, the authors point out the need to help some patients shift from fighting ‘against’ cancer to fighting ‘for’ quality of life.

The first edition of this book, published in 1989, had a wide appeal. This edition is bigger and better. The blend of compassion and scientific integrity will appeal to all cancer professionals who wish to understand more clearly the emotional demands of the diagnosis and modern treatment of cancer, and who wish practical advice about how to improve the lives of people with cancer and their families.

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