

Becoming a Therapist: What Do I Say, and Why?

by Suzanne Bender, M.D., and Edward Messner, M.D.
The Guilford Press, New York, N.Y., 2003, 332 pages, \$35.00.

Becoming A Therapist is a practical, no-nonsense guide to the process of psychotherapy. The primary focus of this text is to provide novice clinicians with strategies to weather the many challenges and pitfalls of conducting psychotherapy. As suggested in the book, "Some people have compared psychotherapy to an impromptu dance between 2 partners. You can plan the first 'hello' and 'thank you' at the end of the set, but what happens between the greetings is unpredictable. However, if you are familiar with some basic and common dance steps, you will have an easier time improvising with a new partner" (p. 1). This book outlines additional steps or interventions that can allow the therapist to improvise and engage with each patient in a uniquely personal way.

The book is organized around describing the aspects of the beginning, middle, and end stages of therapy. Each chapter begins with a succinct summary, a description of the specific stage of therapy, and practical intervention strategies for specific clinical situations. Clinical examples are presented from the point of view of a therapist working with a hypothetical patient. Additional clinical vignettes are presented to describe a wide variety of common clinical situations. The clinical vignettes provide examples of effective and ineffective interventions. For example, in Chapter 3, the conduct of the first interview is presented using 2 different therapeutic styles. In the first example, the therapist conducts the interview in an overly structured manner. In the second example, the therapist uses an overly passive approach to interview the patient. The rest of the chapter explores the benefits and limitations of these contrasting therapeutic approaches.

Becoming a Therapist is divided into 4 major sections: the initial consultation, the frame and variations, chemistry, and therapeutic dilemmas. The first section, Consultation, takes the reader step by step from the first phone contact through gathering a psychological history, fostering a therapeutic alliance, and developing a realistic treatment plan. The second section, Frame and Variations, outlines the issues the therapist often needs to overcome in the initial session, including establishing treatment parameters regarding fees, scheduling, management of phone calls, no-shows, and confidentiality issues. Section III, Chemistry, explores the challenges and treatment obstacles encountered when working effectively with patients who are actively abusing substances while engaged in psychotherapy. This section also provides strategies for integrating psychopharmacology into the frame of a psychotherapeutic relationship. The fourth and final section, Therapeutic Dilemmas, covers the core issues of maintaining a therapeutic relationship, including therapeutic impasses, empathic impasses by transference, and countertransference. This section explores emotional impact on and interpersonal responses of therapist and patient in the wake of termination of therapy.

Though the bulk of the book focuses on psychodynamic psychotherapy, it contains a valuable discussion about the rationale for nonpsychiatric mental health providers obtaining comprehensive medical and psychiatric information on all patients. One of the shortcomings of the book is that it makes little if any reference to how ethnicity and gender affect every aspect of psychotherapy. Ethnic and gender differences are powerful, inescapable influences on all interpersonal relationships and can

generate unique diagnostic and treatment challenges for novice and experienced psychotherapists alike.

This book is a valuable and refreshing resource for both novice therapists and their patients. Though the target audience for this text is psychotherapists in training, it also provides valuable insights for clinicians of all levels and for anyone who wants to take a peek at the inner workings of psychotherapy.

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What Every Patient, Family, Friend, and Caregiver Needs to Know About Psychiatry, 2nd ed.

by Richard W. Roukema, M.D., F.A.P.A. *American Psychiatric Publishing, Inc., Arlington, Va., 2003, 318 pages, \$19.95 (paper).*

The title of Dr. Roukema's book suggests an intended audience of psychiatric patients and their caregivers. His stated purpose is to give an overview of the variety of psychiatric illnesses, helping people to differentiate between the stress and anxiety of daily living and the more serious symptoms that suggest a mental illness. While he succeeds in delivering a clearly drawn and gently worded general reference text, it seems more a text for high school or college psychology students than a guide for patients and for families seeking assistance in understanding and providing aid for their loved ones.

Patients and their families look for explanations and suggestions of different complexity and depth during different stages of illness. The book may be too general for caregivers seeking, for example, specific information on how to explain the behavior or handle the crisis of a loved one with schizophrenia or a substance abuse disorder. The patient and his or her family members may need more sophisticated and detailed information on particular diagnoses than is available in this text.

The book begins with theories of development and personality structure and gives a good explanation of the roles of heredity, parenting, society, and stress in the origin of coping skills and strategies. Psychodynamic explanations are at the forefront, while other theories (e.g., cognitive, interpersonal) are given less emphasis. The impact of cultural beliefs on symptoms and interventions is given only brief mention. Even the case examples concerning serious mental illness, while discussing the role of medication, rely upon primarily dynamic treatment interventions and lack sufficient emphasis on the rehabilitation and recovery models now prominent in community treatment.

The book could serve those readers seeking to understand the background of modern-day psychiatry and give them an idea of the major categories of mental illness, their symptoms, and possible treatments. Because of its broad overview, the text also could function as a reference for laypersons or students wanting to understand theories of etiology and categorization of psychiatric problems. However, because of this book's general nature, it cannot provide the depth of explanation or the variety of treatment options frequently sought by patients and their families.

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