

## Book Review

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*Whole Person Dementia Assessment* by Benjamin T. Mast, PhD, HPP [Health Professions Press], Baltimore, Maryland, 2011, 271 pp.

“What is the meaning of a human being? In dealing with a particular man I do not come upon a generality but upon an individuality, upon uniqueness, upon a person. I see a face, not only a body; a special situation, not a typical case. The disease is common, the patient is unique.”

“The Insecurity of Freedom”, Abraham Joshua Heschel, 1966

In the past decade, new avenues have been developed for measuring amyloid deposition and neuronal loss in the brain using biomarkers, including cerebrospinal fluid analysis and positron emission tomography. We also have excellent techniques for assessing the many cognitive deficits seen in dementia. The movement for so-called “personalized medicine” strives to tailor therapy to the patient’s unique genome. Yet, there is the lurking threat that in our modern world of high-tech methods and financial pressure to increase patient volume we will lose the essence of genuine personalized medicine, which is *attention to the patient and the caregiver*. This book contributes to the growing interest in understanding the person as a whole and not only the deficits caused by dementia as they experience progression. Benjamin Mast, PhD, Associate Professor of Psychological and Brain Sciences, and Associate Clinical Professor of Family and Geriatric Medicine, University of Louisville, has authored this volume which provides a valuable novel approach to dementia by emphasizing the personhood of the patient. He presents mechanisms for evaluation of the impact of the disease on the person and caregiver and suggests ways to best help them cope with the impact of illness. This comprehensive volume reviews the purpose of dementia assessment, how it can be done, and how the results can be presented to the patient and family. Dr. Mast effectively describes how the assessment interaction can be organized to enhance an optimistic and realistic approach. Through his whole person

approach, the reader is repeatedly reminded that “there is more to life than cognition” and “a good quality of life that involves joy, love, engagement, satisfaction, and other meaningful experiences remains possible”. Furthermore, the positive aspects of caregiving are presented and the opportunity for people to find meaning in relationships, even in the context of dementia, are reviewed. Dr Mast explains the importance of interactions with health care providers based on trust and outlines the importance of the continuity of the relationship. He presents valuable case discussions to illustrate the salient issues of person centered assessment and care. Dr. Mast explains ways to understand disturbing behaviors exhibited by the person with dementia, which are usually responses to difficult situations, and presents the value of understanding these situations from the whole person approach. He provides insights on how to build on the abilities yet preserved in the face of dementia and emphasizes that while doing the whole person dementia assessment, the interviewer “should seek to communicate that the person remains valued through the way you listen to her story.” Thus, while the Whole Person Dementia Assessment method uses well validated dementia, psychometric, and standardized assessment techniques (included in eight appendices at the end of the book), it also includes additional questions about the person and his or her life experience thereby successfully integrating queries related to the person with queries specific to the disease.

In recent years, there has been considerable advocacy toward person-centered care focusing on understanding challenging behaviors and their management through modifying the psychosocial environment to providing individualized and personalized care. Dr. Mast discusses related interventions for the caregiver and suggests that “whole person approaches” to caregivers will result in a collaborative approach to intervention between the clinician, caregiver, and the person with dementia, allowing the latter two to reconnect and for the caregiver to better understand how to

provide need-driven care. The book would have benefited from further practical discussions concerning interventions for the person with dementia, concerning approaches such as “life review and reminiscence as a method to promote continuity and well-being” and “maintaining and enhancing activity” to improve quality of life and psychological well-being.

There is no doubt whatsoever that this book presents important guidance for medical professionals. The volume should be required reading for residents in neurology, psychiatry, and geriatrics. It is also recommended for neurologists, psychiatrists, geriatricians, psychologists, social workers, nurses, and others

dealing with patients with Alzheimer’s disease and related disorders. The Whole Person Dementia Assessment method is highly relevant for the patient and the family and will contribute to interventions resulting in enhanced person-centered dementia care.

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