

BOOK REVIEW

The Post-Polio Experience, Margaret E. Backman, pp. 218, 2006. Price \$18.95 US. ISBN 0 595 38639 3. iUniverse Inc, Lincoln, USA.

Margaret E. Backman is a clinical psychologist specialized in helping individuals to cope with medical illnesses and physical disabilities. The book reflects her experience of working with post-polio survivors, in addition to covering some more general aspects of the subject. It is intended primarily for survivors of polio and their families, but also includes a physician's guide to understanding post-polio syndrome (PPS). Thus it provides a good deal of information and advice not easily found elsewhere, and would also be valuable reading for the whole range of professionals who work with post-polio patients.

The book takes up an important, but often forgotten, topic for this group of persons, namely the experience as children of having polio and the effects that it will have in later life. The specific problems found in different age groups are dealt with.

Information is provided on different psychological reactions to PPS. Problems such as fear of being abundant, loss and bereavement, and the psychological meaning of using a respirator are discussed. Comment is made often on an often-discussed topic: Is there a polio personality? The author warns against the overuse of labelling of a type of personality, such as type A, which can interfere with the deeper understanding of the late effects of polio. However, there is some common ground that polio survivors share in their reaction to life events. Self-image and PPS, the need for boundaries, changing roles, and tackling stress are some aspects dealt with in separate chapters. The problem is discussed in relation to children,

parents and spouses. Spouses and others are given advice such as to "speak out".

Patients' fear and reluctance to go to a doctor is discussed, as is the need to take an active role in one's own healthcare. Notable among the advice for physicians is: Listen to the patients, as they know their bodies past and present, reassure the patients that they do not have a new neurological disorder (if this is the case), use a team treatment approach, and recognize their psychological distress as well as their physical decline.

In summary, this book provides a good deal of valuable information on PPS, in particular on reaction to the condition at an early stage as a child, and on the pattern of psychological distress, reaction and adaptation to PPS. In line with the scope of the book, the more physiological and medical aspects are not enlarged upon. The book does not contain many references and the content is based mainly on the author's personal experience of working with patients with PPS. On the other hand, the pattern of reaction and adaptation described confers well with what can be found in the literature from more scientific studies. It would have been of value, however, if the author had included some of these references.

This book can be recommended for post-polio teams, in addition to the main focus group, the polio survivors and their family.

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