On Suffering: Pathways to Healing and Health

Beverley M. Clarke

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Beverley Clarke provides a comprehensive overview of the concept of suffering and how it affects the recovery process and well-being of people with chronic illness and disability. She distinguishes between suffering and pain as separate concepts that do not necessarily affect one another: suffering occurs when a person's identity and sense of personhood are threatened. Recognizing the attributes of suffering as different and separate from those of pain, she argues, is important because it allows health care professionals to recognize the attributes of suffering experienced by the patients they work with.

Clarke draws on many years of experience as a physiotherapist in presenting evidence to demonstrate the unique attributes of suffering and its impact on the health care and rehabilitation process, as well as on the psychosocial well-being of people with chronic illness and disability, including arthritis, epilepsy, headaches, and spinal-cord injury. One of her primary objectives in *On Suffering* is to introduce the Measurement and Assessment of Suffering Questionnaire (MASQ), which can be used in clinical settings and in research.

This book and the MASQ fill a gap in the literature as well as in clinical practice: many health care professionals lack the knowledge and training to recognize signs of suffering, as well as the ability to implement appropriate interventions and strategies to diminish barriers to recovery and facilitate long-term management of life with chronic illness or disability.

I enjoyed this book and found it extremely well organized and very comprehensive. It is both a resource and a teaching tool for health care professionals and researchers. Clarke provides excellent references that will be helpful to professionals unfamiliar with the literature on suffering. Addressing the issues of suffering experienced by people receiving health care and/or rehabilitation is very important to supporting the recovery process and management of life with chronic illness or disability. However, health care professionals may find it a challenge to adequately assess and treat the suffering that patients experience, as shorter lengths of stay in both acute-care and rehabili-

tation facilities may not be conducive to dealing with these issues effectively.

The book is organized into three sections. Part 1, "Suffering (What Man Has Made of Man)," provides a comprehensive overview of the concept of suffering and distinguishes it as separate from pain. Using evidence from more than 30 years of clinical experience as a physiotherapist, Clarke describes how suffering is experienced by patients receiving care in acute-care and rehabilitation settings, as well as the responses of health care professionals, particularly their ability to develop strategies and treatment plans to diminish the negative impact that suffering may have on the recovery process and on the long-term psychosocial well-being of their patients. Research has found that health care professionals lack the tools they need to recognize attributes of suffering and implement appropriate interventions. Clarke reveals how current health care practices and policies support power imbalances in the relationship between health professionals and patients, creating disadvantages for patients in developing the skills and knowledge they need to adjust to life with chronic illness and/or disability.

In Part 2, "Identifying Those Who Suffer (Now Is the Time to Know)," Clarke introduces MASQ. She offers a detailed overview, citing specific examples of information sought for different patient groups, and presents research on the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. She then provides step-by-step usage and scoring guidelines, with examples. Part 3, "Caring for Those Who Suffer (When the World Is Too Much With Us)," presents several interventions that health professionals can use to reduce the suffering patients experience, with reference to the examples cited earlier in the book.

On Suffering: Pathways to Healing and Health presents relevant research and details about the experience of suffering. I recommend this book for professionals already working with patients with chronic illness or disability, as well as those interested in pursuing a career in medicine, rehabilitation, or allied health care.

Laura Roberta Moll, MSW, RSW, Grad.Dip.Ger, PhD
Sessional Instructor, Health Studies Program,
University College, University of Toronto;
laura.moll@utoronto.ca

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