Mental Health Today... And Tomorrow
Exploring current and future trends in mental health

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Introduction

Mental health is starting to attract the broader attention it needs and deserves. For far too long it has been the poor relation of physical health, despite the now obvious truth of the World Health Organization’s ‘No health without mental health’, a key phrase that helped launch their comprehensive mental health action plan, and which was subsequently adopted as the title of the current UK mental health policy. This book marks a turning point in UK mental health theory, policy and practice. Mental health services have spent most of their history cut off from the rest of society, largely performing the job of picking up the pieces after everything else has failed. Its role and purpose needs to change, and the less than splendid isolation is coming to an end.

This change is happening in a number of places. Well-being is no longer seen as a fluffy middle class concept, but as a fundamental part of the human condition. The happiness agenda may have come and gone, but well-being and public mental health seem likely to stay rather longer. Mental well-being is now considered by an increasing number of people as both a measurable and a possible outcome of well-designed interventions. But understanding and definitions of well-being are not consistent, and the overlap with public mental health and preventing mental ill-health can be confusing. We hope some of the chapters dedicated to these themes will shed some light and help people to develop their own ideas.

The nature of public mental health itself is also changing. The complicated relationship between mental health and mental ill-health is becoming more widely accepted and explored although perhaps not completely understood. Public mental health is now a legitimate lens through which to understand our responses to everything from prevention to mental health service provision. This can be challenging as the term ‘mental health’ and the provision of what have always been referred to as mental health services almost always refers to mental illness services and treatment delivery. We need to get used to saying ‘mental health’ when we mean mental health, and not confusing this with mental illness.

Thinking about the broader population, combined with the economic realities of our time, should require us to be able to explain the value of every penny we spend, and it seems likely that current models of mental health care will be unsustainable in the years ahead. Prevention, services for children and a stronger focus on resilience are not just ambitions, they probably represent our only chance of finding a way of providing improved mental health for all. Our aim is to encourage everyone with an interest in mental health to get the best possible
return for the effort and resources applied, and a considerable proportion of this book reflects these debates and discussions. Reflected throughout the chapters that follow are themes of well-being, resilience, and extending our awareness of mental health interventions and support into schools and workplaces as well as other everyday settings.

Although placing mental health in a broader health and social context is essential, it should not be done at the expense of those who experience mental ill-health or are using specialist mental health services. We look at the future of mental health services, the results of a major review of current services and likely future trends. We also look at an international example of how to shift from an individual illness model to an approach that focuses on community solutions to community problems. The book also challenges historical thinking on diagnosis and disease, suggesting that there is value in a more rights-based approach that is consistent with contemporary thinking on disability. We also explore the concept of ‘parity of esteem’, testing whether it is possible or even useful to make comparisons between physical and mental health and, if so, what that would actually look like.

Our approach to this book also marks a significant change in role for mental health service users. Previous editions of this book and its sister publications have provided a platform for promoting effective service user and carer involvement, but in this volume service users and carers are writing on a range of topics that stretches far beyond traditional service user involvement. We write on the language, imagery and interpretations of mental distress, on self-management and peer support, and on leadership.

I have been involved with this series of handbooks for some years now, and I have taken the liberty of tweaking the title. This reflects our desire to encourage people to look forward, and no looking forward would be complete without considering the impact of technology on mental health.

This book has been written during a period of austerity, but I hope that it will also be read in a future period of prosperity and investment. Looking forward is important; it gives us a sense of perspective and should give us something to look forward to. It is also good for our mental health and well-being.