

## Bioethics Books: Reviews

CBS Reviewer: Dr. Zoe Bernatsky, STD

Date of Published Review: May 2018

Review of: David B. Cooper (ed.) *Ethics in Mental Health-Substance Use* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2017) 348 pp. (available in hardback, paperback and eBook).

---

### Review

Research demonstrates that approximately 50% of American adults who experience mental health or substance-use issues face *both* mental health and substance use challenges.<sup>1</sup> *Ethics in Mental Health-Substance Use* employs a multi-disciplinary and holistic method to explore challenges that affect the lives of individuals with mental health and substance use issues and those who love and care for them. The authors, which include nurses, physicians, psychologists, ethicists and lawyers outline challenges such as the assessment of capacity for treatment in “high-stakes” treatment choices such as electroconvulsive therapy or medical assistance in dying since mental health conditions and substance use can impact the capacity to confer consent for such treatment. Principles related to contemporary issues such as harm reduction and respect for boundaries within dual relationships are introduced, making this book a particularly useful guide for practitioners and ethicists new to this field of practice.

The book is set up in a concise format with case studies, interactive exercises, and guiding questions for self-assessment. Chapters 1-3 introduce ethical frameworks to guide professional practice. These include reflective approaches, such as virtue and care ethics, and instrumental approaches, such as the utilitarian, deontological or four principles approach. Cases are used to underscore that in some situations, the ‘best’ option is not readily obvious or achievable. Chapters 4-7 highlight the need for practitioners to acquire skills and dispositions such as cultural sensitivity, compassion, respect, and dignity, in order to be effective in their work with these often vulnerable and stigmatized individuals. I was particularly impressed by Chapter 8 which explores a way forward, using a virtue framework. Here, practitioners are encouraged to exercise practical wisdom arising from moral skill (rooted in experience and reflection) and moral will (based doing what is right for the right reasons) as they

---

1. Colleen M. Fisher, Jennifer Simmelink McCleary, Peter Dimock & Julie Rohovit, “Provider Preparedness for Treatment of Co-occurring Disorders: Comparison of Social Workers and Alcohol and Drug Counselors” *Social Work Education* 33, no. 5 (June 11, 2014): 629-641. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2014.919074>.

encounter persons with complex stories and multifaceted challenges. Chapters 9-15 focus on challenges related to policy development which include human rights issues such as informed consent, abstinence vs. harm reduction approaches, the importance of gender sensitive services, and difficulties employing “gold-standard” research techniques. The critical challenge of evaluation of capacity for consent and self-determination are central matters of ethical concern, particularly when there is a threat to self or others, or when the benefits of treatment are uncertain and the burdens significant (e.g. the use of electroconvulsive therapy). Finally, chapters 16-21 relate to the special concerns of younger and older individuals, high risk sexual behavior, cannabis use, palliative care and assisted death.

*Ethics in Mental Health-Substance Use* is a must read for those who work in the field of mental health and substance use, especially for professionals new to this area. The use of realistic case studies provides an opportunity to better understand ethical principles and frameworks and how they can be employed in the pursuit of holistic health of individuals with mental health and substance use challenges. Reflective exercises are also well-suited for professional development. Senior leadership and policy developers who have mental health and substance use within a larger portfolio and whose responsibility it is to be informed about ethical concerns related to research and practice, will also find this book helpful. Limitations include the fact that no patient was a chapter author and proficient practitioners might already be familiar with the content, however, the multi-disciplinary patient-centered approach is refreshing and makes the text a very helpful addition to Mental Health-Substance Use series. Cooper and his colleagues make an important contribution to the field of mental health, substance use and ethics by surveying the field and outlining the most critical themes in the field today.

## **Bibliography**

Colleen M. Fisher, Jennifer Simmelink McCleary, Peter Dimock & Julie Rohovit, “Provider Preparedness for Treatment of Co-occurring Disorders: Comparison of Social Workers and Alcohol and Drug Counselors,” *Social Work Education* 33 , no. 5, 2014. (Accessed November 22, 2017 <https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2014.919074>)

**About the author:** Dr. Zoe Bernatsky is Assistant Professor – Pastoral Theology at Newman Theological College. In addition to a Doctorate in Moral Theology from the Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara, she holds degrees in Nursing and Health Administration and has extensive experience in clinical care and administration in the health care sector.