



The Secret Language of Eating Disorders: The Revolutionary New Approach to Understanding and Curing Anorexia and Bulimia

Peggy Claude-Pierre. Random House. 1997. \$32. ISBN 0-679-30874-1

Overall rating: Poor
Strengths: Moving account of a mother's struggle to help her daughters
Weaknesses: Incomplete; no mention of other work that has been done in the field
Audience: Not recommended

I was interested to read Peggy Claude-Pierre's book because my own work is in this area and many of my patients and their families have asked me about this clinic in Victoria. Given the relative paucity of accurate information and of treatment resources, I hoped this book would be helpful. However, I was disappointed on both counts and, by the time I finished the book, was also rather worried.

The initial part has a moving account of a mother's struggle with 2 severely ill daughters. But beyond this point, I have grave concerns about what I read. The book's subtitle, "The revolutionary new approach to understanding and curing anorexia and bulimia," clearly gives the impression that the author has developed a new approach to the treatment of these difficult illnesses. Unfortunately, the ideas in the book are neither new nor revolutionary, and framing them as such is extremely misleading. The central "theoretical" concept in the book, the confirmed negativity concept (or the idea that individuals with anorexia have profound deficits in self-esteem), was first elucidated over 30 years ago by Hilde Bruch.¹ The no-

tion that addressing the patterns of thinking in patients with anorexia might be helpful has been developed into the practice of cognitive therapy. This has been an essential element of treatment for over 20 years. Ms. Claude-Pierre neither reviews nor acknowledges the vast scientific literature on this topic and, more seriously, claims the ideas to be her own.

Beyond the lengthy description of her theoretical framework, there is actually very little description of what goes on in the treatment program. This is curious, to say the least, considering that treatment at this clinic often lasts 12 to 18 months. Judging by the limited information presented in the book, the program does not sound very different from many other treatment programs. The total absence of any information on rates of recovery (or any definition as to the nature of recovery) is also extremely troublesome, especially in light of the author's oft-quoted claims as to the success of her treatments.

Her treatment is expensive. The clinic has not publicized its prices, but the cost of a single month's stay is reported to be as much as \$30 000 (four times the cost of a typical expert treatment program). If there was evidence for improved efficacy of her program compared with others, it might be concluded that the cost was worthwhile; however, there is little in this book to justify such a conclusion.

Families with severely ill children suffering from anorexia nervosa are in a vulnerable, desperate state. Parents with a dying child will, naturally, do almost anything to try to help him or her. Current treatments, although they provide relief to many, are not cure-alls. Some patients take many years to recover, and some die despite all attempts to rescue them. Ms. Claude-Pierre gives the impression that other available expert treatments

are inevitably ineffective; this is both untrue and dangerous.

Increased effectiveness in treatments for anorexia nervosa is an important priority for everyone working in this field. Unfortunately, there is no evidence from this book that Ms. Claude-Pierre has anything to offer.

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Reference

1. Bruch H. Perceptual and conceptual disturbances in anorexia nervosa. *Psychosomatic Med* 1962;24:187-94.

Books and other media received

Livres et autres documents reçus

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Ethics

Medical Harm: Historical, Conceptual, and Ethical Dimensions of Iatrogenic Illness. V.A. Sharpe, A.I. Faden. 280 pp. Cambridge U Pr. 1998. ISBN 0-521-57133-2

Research

SI Units for Clinical Measurement. Edited by D.S. Young, E.J. Huth. 331 pp. Illust. American College of Physicians. 1998. US\$36. ISBN 0-943126-51-7