

Quickies: The Handbook of Brief Sex Therapy. S Green, D Flemons (eds). London, UK: W W Norton & Company Ltd, 2007. ISBN: 0-393-70527-0. Price: £13.99. Pages: 314 (revised and expanded paperback edition)

I like this book. At the start, I wasn't quite sure why I liked it. On the surface, it is 'just another' counselling book: a series of 14 snapshot comments given by 21 experts on the issue of sex therapy, and what can be done for a range of problems and with a range of approaches. So why does this book, as opposed to some others I have reviewed for this journal, gain my applause rather than my opprobrium?

The two reasons why are both contained in the title: 'Quickies'. First, this is not a book about long-term, but about brief therapy. Don't misunderstand – I am totally supportive of extended therapeutic intervention. But this book lays out its stall as being equally supportive of brief therapeutic intervention, and more, shows just how and why such intervention can work: "as soon as possible and when appropriate, we reassure our clients that they are no longer in need of extended professional help". That statement seems to me to be to be respectful of client and therapist alike, and very optimistic for both.

The other reason I like this book is also contained in the title – specifically in the double entendre that the title creates. In short, the editors – and many of the 21 contributors – though eminently committed to their work, also think it relevant from time to time to be just a tad lighthearted. No, this book is not a barrel of laughs – but as the contributors comment, humour in therapy "might be the very thing that helps turn round a serious, relationship-threatening situation". The style and approach, therefore, while extremely credible and highly useful, is down-to-earth, accessible and refreshing.

Any weaknesses? Not really. The book does exactly what it says on the tin – offering therapists practical tools for their work, and non-therapists an interesting insight into that work. Both camps will learn a lot and, perhaps more importantly, come away with exactly the result that the authors say they want: more understanding, more ideas and, above all, more optimism.

Reviewed by **Susan Quilliam**, BA, Cert Ed, MNLP
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Contraception Today (6th edn). J Guillebaud.
London, UK: Informa Healthcare, 2007. ISBN:

0-415-41743-3. Price: £19.99. Pages: 164 (paperback)

The sixth edition of this text provides a wealth of largely evidence-based information on the subject, together with practical and realistic clinical advice based on the author's experience.

The mechanism of action and effectiveness of the reversible methods, their contraceptive and non-contraceptive benefits, and the risks and disadvantages are discussed in a comprehensive manner. Meticulous attention has been paid to the eligibility criteria for the various methods and also to appropriate counselling, and ongoing supervision where needed. The sixth edition has an interesting section on 'Contraception for the older woman'. At the end of the text a useful list is provided for further reading on the subject.

To my mind, this well-written book would be of immense value to all health care professionals involved in the practice of reproductive and sexual health.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

Select Committee Hearing on Abortion

The Science and Technology Select Committee of the Houses of Parliament met during October regarding the Scientific Developments relating to the Abortion Act 1967. Written submissions by medical experts, pro-life doctors and campaign groups were presented. Oral evidence was presented to members of the committee regarding the safety of early abortions at home, the requirement of two doctors to agree to a termination and views on a reduction in the upper time limit on abortions from 24 weeks' gestation. Health Minister, Dawn Primarolo, said the government does not believe there is sufficient scientific evidence to lower the legal abortion limit of 24 weeks. The Pro-Life Alliance wants the upper limit for terminations to be cut, but the British Medical Association says the number of fetuses surviving at 24 weeks is still "extremely small". Members of the public are welcome to attend public committee meetings (for details see website below).

Source: http://www.parliament.uk/what_s_on/hoc_news3.cfm

WHO issues consensus advice on family planning

The World Health Organization (WHO) has published a new consensus-based handbook summarising technical and scientific information about available methods of contraception. The handbook is intended to help health care professionals provide family planning methods appropriately and safely. The publication, entitled *Family Planning: A Global Handbook for Providers*, is one of WHO's 'Family Planning Cornerstones', a companion to the *Medical Eligibility Criteria for Contraceptive Use*, the *Selected Practice Recommendations for Contraceptive Use* and the *Decision-Making Tool for Family Planning Clients and Providers* publications.

The handbook, and its accompanying wall chart, "Do You Know Your Family Planning Choices?", can be downloaded at the link below.

Source: http://www.who.int/reproductive-health/publications/fp_globalhandbook/index.htm

New CONSORT Statement website launched

The CONSORT Group is an international and eclectic group, comprising trialists, methodologists and medical journal editors. A new CONSORT Statement website has been launched. The CONSORT Statement is an evidence-based, minimum set of recommendations for reporting randomised controlled trials. It offers a standard way for authors to prepare reports of trial findings, facilitating their complete and transparent reporting, and aiding their critical appraisal and interpretation. This enables readers to understand a trial's design, conduct, analysis and interpretation, and to assess the validity of its results.

Source: www.consort-statement.org

Free condoms fail safety test in South Africa

Each year the South African government distributes more than 400 million condoms in an attempt to control HIV and birth rates. BBC Online have reported that over recent months batches of condoms have been found to be faulty, prompting a recall. One company allegedly bribed a government official to certify that almost 4 million faulty condoms were up to standard. Studies have found that South Africans think the government-issued sheaths were less reliable than pharmacy-bought brands. Of 20 million recalled condoms only 12 million have been recovered.

Source: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/7059394.stm>

Gene-block contraception

Scientists at the Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, MA, USA described a 'gene-block' method of contraception which could one day become available. In the presentation at the American Society for Reproductive Medicine's 63rd Annual Conference the scientists highlighted a technique known as RNA interference (RNAi), through which sperm are prevented from gaining access to the egg. The protein ZP3 is on the zona pellucida, and is the receptor that binds with the acrosome on the

spermatozoa during the acrosome reaction. By 'silencing' the ZP3 gene, the sperm were unable to attach. The new pill, however, will not be available for at least 10 years.

Source: www.asrm.org

Postmenopausal women benefit from squats and foot stamping

Researchers at Griffith University, Queensland, Australia have been testing the effects of foot stamping, squats and line dancing on bone density, strength and balance in sedentary postmenopausal women.¹ Women were assigned to three groups: (1) line dancing weekly, (2) line dancing plus progressively loaded squats and (3) line dancing plus squats and foot stamping. Women in the foot-stamping group lost less proximal femur bone mineral density than women in the line dancing and squatting groups. Women in both the squatting groups had improved lower limb muscle strength and balance.

Reference

- Young CM, Weeks BK, Beck BR. Simple, novel physical activity maintains proximal femur bone mineral density, and improves muscle strength and balance in sedentary, postmenopausal Caucasian women. *Osteoporos Int* 2007; **18**: 1379–1387.

Stress during IVF

While female patients undergoing *in vitro* fertilisation (IVF) or intracytoplasmic sperm injection consistently describe high levels of stress associated with the procedure, study results reported recently indicate how stressful the ovarian stimulation can be and what a negative impact it may have on day-to-day activities. Indeed, the psychological burden associated with the whole IVF treatment programme – especially the long course of daily hormone injections – has its own impact on everyday life quite distinct from concern about fertility or the outcome of treatment.

Source: Brod M. Poster presentation, European Society for Human Reproduction and Embryology meeting in Lyon, France, 1–4 July 2007.

Reported by **Henrietta Hughes**, MRCGP, DFFP
General Practitioner, London, UK

STARS Foundation Education Impact Award

The STARS Foundation Impact Awards support organisations committed to achieving excellence in the provision of services to disadvantaged children and encourage the replication of effective approaches and practices. Each Award provides US\$100 000 of unrestricted funding plus additional consultancy support tailored to meet the needs of the recipients. The winner of the 2007 Education Award is Student Partnership Worldwide (SPW) Tanzania for its work with young people to provide peer-to-peer sexual reproductive health education in remote rural communities.

As in most other parts of the world, it is the young who are most at risk from poverty, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases in Tanzania. As a result of this, the young are not perceived as part of a solution, rather that they are part of the problem. There are few examples of young people taking a proactive role in addressing the challenges they face.

SPW Tanzania's approach is different. Its goal is to ensure that young people make responsible choices concerning their sexual reproductive health and have a lead role in the decision-making processes that affect their lives and their communities. All its work is led by young people through a youth-led volunteer model, which enables it to deliver full-time holistic sexual reproductive health programmes in the most remote rural communities. The programmes reach as many as 75 000 young people each year through volunteer peer educators who have been placed in rural schools. Working in these remote communities for up to 7 months, these educators provide sexual reproductive health education and life skills training. The programmes are delivered for an annual cost of only US \$9 per child and many of the volunteers go on to university and gainful employment as a result of their experience. For further information about the STARS Foundation and Impact Awards visit their website.

Source: www.starsfoundation.org.uk

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Poster promotes contraceptive awareness for young mothers

A new poster produced by Brook encourages young pregnant women to start thinking about contraception while they are still pregnant, rather than waiting until after they have given birth.

The poster, whose headline reads “Believe it or not, now is exactly the right time to be thinking about contraception”, was commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills [Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)]. As part of its strategy to reduce teenage pregnancies the DCSF is working to ensure teenage mothers have the information and support they need to avoid a second unplanned pregnancy. The poster was developed in consultation with a number of groups of young mothers and the professionals who work with them.

Simon Blake, Chief Executive of Brook, said: “Many of the young mothers we talked to told us that after they’d had a baby there were so many things to cope with that contraception

could easily get forgotten. The message of this poster is to sort it out in advance, so that you have one less thing to worry about once you’ve had the baby”.

The poster is being distributed to Children’s Centres and Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinators around the country and is also available for sale from Brook Publications.

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