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SALUTOGENETIC ORIENTATIONS AND MENTAL HEALTH FOR GENERAL PRACTITIONERS

BAHRS, O. & P.F. MATTHIESSEN (2007) *Gesundheitsfördernde Praxen: Die Chancen einer salutogenetischen Orientierung in der hausärztlichen Praxis* (Bern: Hans Huber) 400 pp., ISBN 978-3-456-84454-1, € 39.95

The recently published book, *Gesundheitsfördernde Praxen. Die Chancen einer salutogenetischen Orientierung in der hausärztlichen Praxis* [Health Promoting Medical Practices. The Chances of Salutogenetic Orientations for General Practitioners], edited by Ottomar Bahrs and Peter F. Matthiessen (2006), represents a landmark study in salutogenetic research in Germany. It was implemented and evaluated by a multidisciplinary research team and sponsored by one of the biggest German health insurance companies (AOK). The authors describe the groundbreaking research project and interpret its results. The research project is conceptualised to contribute to and advance the scientific debate on salutogenetic approaches and to offer practical guidelines to physicians for their daily doctor–patient interactions. It also deepens the understanding of ‘auto-salutogenetic’ processes in patients in the context of healing and therapy and reflects on the role and impact of the general practitioner. The book addresses mainly scientifically interested general practitioners, health care providers and specialists in the health sciences, but it might also be of interest to other persons working in the health care field or in medical psychology and sociology. The authors suggest ways of (re-)conceptualisation and (re-)professionalisation of the health care sector and health politics especially in a German context.

The book is divided into eleven chapters: Chapter 1: Introduction with defined research questions and research context; Chapter 2: Salutogenesis and General Practitioners; Chapter 3: Discourses on Disease, Health and Biography; Chapter 4: Methodology; Chapter 5: Presentation of Process and Results of ‘Peer Review Groups’ (German: ‘Qualitätszirkel’); Chapter 6: Disease Management Programme and Salutogenesis; Chapter 7: Presentation of Case Analyses; Chapter 8: Hermeneutic Case Construction and Comparison of Cases; Chapter 9: Dialog of Balancing.

Two chapters must be particularly recommended to the reader: Chapter 4 introduces methodological processes, analytical proceedings and the concept of peer review groups (‘Qualitätszirkel’) that are highly important for the scientific approach of qualitative salutogenetic research. In peer review groups, (medical) professionals meet on a regular basis to monitor their work and share work experiences. The principles of peer review groups aim at quality assurance through case analyses, teamwork, exchange of experiences and self-reflection in both medical and interdisciplinary peer review groups. The presented methods and analyses in the peer review groups are based on discussions, video recordings, and hermeneutic case analyses focussing on

different methods, such as sequential analyses, the analyses of genograms, narrative interview and biographical analyses, as well as perspectives on triangulation and evaluation. This chapter provides an essential overview of state of the art techniques and available options. Chapter 5 focuses on the process and results of peer review and project work. It demonstrates the possibilities of peer review groups in a highly informative way by introducing the work of peer-review groups in two towns in Germany. By observing case management under the salutogenetic premise, we can appreciate the challenges for doctor–patient communication. While general practitioners in Germany commonly use a diagnostic-therapeutic approach focusing on the illness and its causes, the participating doctors of the peer review groups also consider the patient's resources, based on his/her social relationships and biographies, as they might impact on the patient's health. In the end, participants have developed a process-oriented perspective that enhances a holistic approach in doctor–patient communication. This new perspective is mainly important in regard to chronic diseases. The health care of patients with chronic diseases is limited, as long as it is primarily concerned with finding and eliminating the root causes. Instead, treatment has also to consider the meaning that the respective disease (or 'being sick') signifies for the affected persons (and their environment). This meaning is not self-evident; it is rooted in the patient's current life situation, his/her individual history, and, last but not least, in his/her (possible, hoped for, feared) future. Only by taking this meaning into account, can an appropriate treatment plan be developed – or can the lack of a patient's cooperation be understood. For a shared treatment based on shared decision-making, the physician needs to have interpretive competence, while the patient needs to have a salutogenetic orientation. Thus, the treatment of individual cases always requires a hermeneutical approach, which commonly remains only implicit. This study attempts to determine in which way the medical practice could benefit from making it explicit.

It is particularly the case studies and the evaluation of project-immanent workshops which catch the attention of the reader. Here, the authors not only reflect on salutogenetic approaches to medical treatment, but also evaluate tools of self-reflection and options of supervision in the medical practice. Overall, this book offers a profound insight into challenges and opportunities of salutogenetic doctor–patient communication. Not only does it deal effectively with this future-oriented topic, but it also provides an innovative scientific approach towards a holistic medical practice in Germany.