

Claire Wilson looks at some helpful ways that we can include spiritual care in the support we offer patients with mental illness

PSYCHIATRY & THE GREAT COMMISSION



Psychediatric disorders are now one of the leading global contributors to burden of disease.¹ So, how can I best serve my mentally unwell patients? And what unique contribution can I make as a Christian?

Last year Christian psychiatrists met for a CMF day conference to explore this question. The theme was *'Psychiatry and the Great Commission'*. The Great Commission in Matthew² tells us to 'go and make disciples of all nations'. As healthcare providers, we are in a privileged position to advocate for the integration of a spiritual approach to routinely delivered healthcare. As Christians in this sphere, we can also use opportunities to demonstrate Christ's love and share the Good News. Here I consider how the Great Commission may apply to mental healthcare.

Assessing a patient with mental illness

Gaining an initial insight into a patient's spiritual journey is pivotal to understanding how we can support them. It is important for all healthcare providers of any faith background, but I would argue that it is particularly crucial for us as Christians if we are to integrate the Great Commission into our clinical practice.

One way of doing this is spiritual history-taking, with which some readers may be familiar. In *Good Medical Practice*, the GMC states that we should: '*Adequately assess the patient's conditions, taking account of their history (including the symptoms and psychological, spiritual, social and cultural factors), their views and values.*' It also states: '*It may, therefore, be appropriate to ask a patient about their personal beliefs. However, you must not put pressure on a patient to discuss or justify their beliefs or the absence of them.*'³

The Royal College of Psychiatrists has some excellent resources on spiritual history-taking.⁴ However, a single question such as 'do you have a faith that helps you when you are struggling?' can suffice and may provide opportunities for further conversations about faith. We must also be mindful of not underestimating the value of bringing our patients to our God in prayer and of the power that he has to open hearts and minds.

Supporting a patient with mental illness

As Christian healthcare professionals seeking to live out the Great Commission, are there any other resources which we can offer our patients with mental illness who are Christians or exploring the Christian faith, having first explored issues of faith through sensitive conversation and supporting them in prayer? This was the focus of much of our afternoon discussions at our day conference.

As psychiatrists, we have worked with CMF to compile a list of some Christian resources which may be helpful to patients who are mentally unwell. Another source of resources is the Mind and Soul Foundation website⁵ and of course, the CMF website. We hope that readers, as fellow Christian healthcare professionals, will feel able to signpost their patients to them.

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Books

- *Lament for a Son* by Nicholas Wolterstorff provides an account of grief and suffering from a Christian philosopher who is also a father who has lost his son.
- *Little Book of Chaos* published by Lifewords is a brief, easy to read and free resource which can be requested online. It discusses how God is present throughout life's difficulties.
- *Battlefield of the Mind* by Joyce Meyer provides a biblical perspective on managing challenging emotions.
- *I'm not supposed to feel like this: a Christian approach to Depression and Anxiety* by Chris Williams et al. Chris is a Christian psychiatrist and leading academic, known for his work in the early development of CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy). In this book, Chris and his colleagues provide Christians with practical support in managing anxiety and depression.
- *Mindful of the Light* and *Finding the Yes in the Mess* by Stephen Critchlow. Stephen is also a Christian psychiatrist known for his work in raising awareness of mental ill-health among the general public. In these books, he brings his skills as a lay communicator to explain a range of psychiatric disorders through a Christian lens.
- *First Steps out of Eating Disorders* and *First Steps out of Anxiety* by Kate Middleton is a Christian psychologist's guide to navigating anxiety and eating disorders within a biblical framework.
- *The Worry Book, The Guilt Book* and *The Perfectionism Book* by Will van der Hart and Rob Waller. Will and Rob (also a Christian psychiatrist) also provide a Christian perspective on making sense of difficult feelings and offer suggestions on managing them.

Websites

- biblicalcounselling.org.uk provide not only signposting to sources of biblical counselling support but also free online resources.
- l1ttf.com offer a range of free online CBT resources from Chris Williams (book mentioned above), including 'Living Life to the Full with God'.
- hope4mentalhealth.com from Pastor Rick Warren. Somewhat US-centric but with several helpful resources and videos.
- *CMF file 64: Mindfulness* by James May cmf.li/37AEsS2 is a considered analysis of the implications for Christians of what is becoming an increasingly popular tool for mental well-being.
- drsunil.com Sunil Raheja is a Christian psychiatrist; his blog and podcast series discusses ways to navigate life's difficulties.

reference (accessed 18 February 2020)

1. James S L, Abate D, Abate K H, et al. Global, regional, and national incidence, prevalence, and years lived with disability for 354 diseases and injuries for 195 countries and territories, 1990-2017: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2017. *The Lancet* 2018; 392(10159): 1789-858.
2. Matthew 28:19
3. General Medical Council. *Good Medical Practice*. bit.ly/2wluYMN
4. Royal College of Psychiatrists Spirituality and Psychiatry Special Interest Group. bit.ly/2P2A0o2
5. Mind and Soul Foundation. mindandsoulfoundation.org