PRACTICAL SOCIAL WORK

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Social work is at an important stage in its development. All professions must be responsive to changing social and economic conditions if they are to meet the needs of those they serve. This series focuses on sound practice and the specific contributions which social workers can make to the well-being of our society.

The British Association of Social Workers has always been conscious of its role in setting guidelines for practice and in seeking to raise professional standards. The conception of the Practical Social Work series arose from a survey of BASW members to discover where they, the practitioners in social work, felt there was the most need for new literature. The response was overwhelming and enthusiastic, and the result is a carefully planned, coherent series of books. The emphasis is firmly on practice set in a theoretical framework. The books will inform, stimulate and promote discussion, thus adding to the further development of skills and high professional standards. All the authors are practitioners and teachers of social work representing a wide variety of experience.

JO CAMPLING

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First published 1995 by
The MACMILLAN PRESS LTD
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 2XS
and London
Companies and representatives throughout the world

ISBN 978-0-333-58441-5 ISBN 978-1-349-23805-7 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-23805-7

A catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library.

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To Mary and Daniel with love
For all the times I've driven them to drink

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Preface

Public concern about drug abuse is mounting right around the world. The World Health Organisation, for example, recently declared that the prevention of drug addiction (including alcohol and tobacco) must now be a top priority in developed and developing countries alike. In recent years, several countries in Europe, the Americas and various parts of South East Asia, including Thailand and Malaysia, have all mounted concerted campaigns against drug abuse involving media promotions, increased law enforcement efforts and expanded treatment and prevention services. In Australia, Britain and the United States, pressure has even been brought to bear on tertiary institutions to provide more content within social work programmes on drug addiction. Undoubtedly some of the current urgency surrounding drug abuse relates to the spectre of AIDS and the suggestion that intravenous drug users are now acting as a bridge between the homosexual and heterosexual communities. The economic recession gripping most of the developed world has also made policy-makers look hard at the direct and indirect financial costs of alcohol abuse in particular.

This book has been written in response to the pressure for greater understanding among generalist social workers about drug addiction and how to deal with it. Most generalist workers will encounter drug abuse within the context of some other, often more pressing, social problem such as financial crisis, homelessness or domestic violence, and unless the underlying addictive behaviour is addressed, the problems will not be satisfactorily resolved. Whereas most of the popular treatment approaches focus solely or primarily on users themselves, this book seeks to operationalise the social work commitment to holism by taking account of

broader systemic influences on the maintenance of addiction and the promotion of behaviour change. Where possible I have also concentrated on brief intervention techniques under the assumption that most generalist workers will need to work primarily on the presenting problem, while attempting to address the underlying addictive behaviour which may be sustaining it.

In Chapter 1 the notions of 'drug' and 'addiction' are examined and it is discovered that neither concept is self-evident. Not only does the subjective drug experience differ from one culture to another and even from one person to another, but the World Health Organisation itself has not always been clear about precisely what the term 'drug' denotes. 'Addiction' is an even more vexing issue, with related terms such as 'addictive behaviour', 'dependence', 'misuse', 'overuse' and 'abuse' carrying almost ideological overtones within drug specialist circles. Chapter 2 moves from the addiction debate to develop an approach which is rooted in the social work perspective on the human condition. Beginning with the stages through which drug users are known to pass on their way to resolving the problem, Chapter 2 considers the potential of social work's 'person-in-situation' tradition to guide intervention at each stage. From a social work perspective, some of the phenomena covered by the term drug addiction can best be understood at aggregate levels. This is to say the 'glue' which holds an individual to his or her addiction could be just as much a property of the social situation as of the individual. As a result, the focus of social work intervention in the remainder of the book shifts backwards and forwards between different system levels as the drug user passes through the different stages of change.

Drawing on the model developed in Chapter 2, Chapter 3 goes on to look at probably the most common kind of drug user confronted by social workers – the resistant kind! Although most drug-related social turmoil is created by individuals who have no intention of moderating their intake, very little research has yet been done on how to move such people towards change. What is known about this most difficult task is reported in Chapter 3. Almost all the tech-

niques covered in Chapter 3 occur at the microsystem level precisely because the user himself or herself is inaccessible and resistant. However, if the pressures on them are sufficient, resisters will eventually become prevaricators or, as they are more commonly called, 'contemplators'. These individuals are engaged at some level in an internal dialogue about the pros and cons of changing and Chapter 4 looks at counselling strategies that may help them decide. For the worker, contemplation signals a shift in focus from the microsystem to the user. The worker's task now is to help the user weigh up the decision and achieve the necessary motivation required for lasting change.

This focus on the individual continues in Chapter 5 which outlines the 'action' stage technique commonly referred to as behavioural self-control training (BSCT). BSCT involves a simple set of procedures for teaching drug misusers how to recognise and cope with occasions of high risk where they may have been accustomed to using drugs. Chapter 6 deals with the maintenance or 'relapse prevention' stage of change, and the focus of social work intervention now broadens to include but also transcend the individual user. Cognitive-behavioural tactics are covered first before the chapter moves to microsystem, exosystem and even macrosystem interventions for the prevention of relapse. Finally, in Chapter 7, we look at the considerations involved in evaluating the work that has been conducted.

JAMES G. BARBER