

Book review

A Clinician's Brief Guide to the Mental Health Act

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This is the fourth edition of this compact guide to the Mental Health Act (MHA) and will be the last by its original Author Tony Zigmond. As psychiatrists, the authors have pitched this book particularly at those doctors who regularly act, or are looking towards acting, under the remit of the MHA 1983, although it remains informative to others who work with, or are affected by, this legislation.

As is explicit in the title, this book is approachably concise and does not assume to cover every area of this complex legal arena. Despite this it manages to include two useful opening chapters which set the context for the MHA through exploration of different forms of legislation. It was pleasing to see Articles of the Human Rights Act applied in detail to mental health-related cases. There is acknowledgement also of how differing interpretations of the law mean that it does not always provide a straightforward solution. The authors illustrate this aspect, and many other areas of practice throughout, by regular reference to case law examples, which provide useful context and add a human element to the text.

The Mental Capacity Act, and its relation in practice to the MHA, is addressed, and there is a useful guidance on a range of difficult

practice issues, such as medical treatment for detained service users, and what counts as "appropriate medical treatment" within the remit of the MHA. Other areas addressed are Part 3 of the MHA relating to courts and prisons, use of community treatment orders and appealing against detention under the act.

The book concludes with practical advice on gaining Section 12 or approved clinician status, along with information specific to use of the MHA in Wales.

As a previously practising approved mental health professional (AMHP), I would like to have seen more emphasis on the process of assessment under the MHA, for example the benefits of undertaking joint assessments and exploring how decisions are reached, since it is only through this that an application to detain can be made. As it is, the role of non-medics in MHA assessments is only briefly acknowledged.

It remains, however, a very readable and clear guide, written very much from the psychiatrist's perspective, but with emphasis on the rights of service users. I would have been happy as an AMHP to work with a psychiatrist who was as informed and good-humoured as this book.

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