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# **Coping with Stress in the Health Professions**

**A practical guide**

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**Springer-Science+Business Media, B.V.**

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First edition 1991

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Originally published by Chapman and Hall in 1991.

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**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

Burnard, Philip

Coping with stress in the health professions.

1. Medical personnel. Stress

I. Title

610.69019

ISBN 978-0-412-38910-8 ISBN 978-1-4899-3338-6 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-1-4899-3338-6

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data available**

**For Les, Paul, Mark and Ian**

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## Acknowledgements

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This is not just a book about stress. It is a book about coping with stress in the health professions. I am very grateful to a number of social workers, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, teachers and students who have told me what they find stressful in their work and how they cope with stress themselves. I have used much of this information in the form of direct quotes and as composite case studies. My thanks go to: Irmgard Bauer, J. Bonsall, Liz Brown, Ian Chesterfield, Elizabeth Ingram, Tim Kilner, Sandy Kirkman, Sinead Lodge, Rosie Morton, John Pugh, Annie Rae, A. Thomas, and all the people who have helped me.

Thanks, too, to my colleague and friend, Paul Morrison – particularly for his discussion on the issue of *caring* in the health professions.

As always, I am grateful to Jo Campling for her guidance and editorial advice.

Acknowledgement is given to Pergamon Press, Oxford, for permission to use the Holmes–Rahe Social Readjustment Rating Scale. Acknowledgement is also given to Meg Bond of the Human Potential Resource Group, University of Surrey, Guildford, for permission to quote from J. Heron's 1981 Paradigm Papers, in Chapter 1.

Most of all, thanks go to my family: my wife, Sally, and my children, Aaron and Rebecca, who have been patient and supportive throughout the project.

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## Preface

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Stress is a feature of all of our lives. The business of working in the health professions means that we are constantly being exposed to stress. That stress can sometimes be enriching and motivating. It has often been pointed out that stress can be positive or negative. When stress is positive, it rarely needs any further attention. When it is negative, it is a problem.

The first aim of this book is to discuss the various sorts of stress that may be experienced by a variety of health professionals, including social workers, nurses, doctors, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and others. What they all have in common is that they work closely with other people – people who often have emotional problems or problems in living. Working with other people who are troubled in this way is indeed stressful. For too long it has been assumed that health professionals should ‘get on with it’ and put up with any stress that is involved in caring for others.

The second aim of this book is to offer practical ways of coping with negative stress. These methods range from simple relaxation techniques, through meditation to methods that involve discussing stress with others: counselling, co-counselling and group work.

All the methods described in this book have been used with a variety of health professionals, and not all of these methods will necessarily appeal to you. One of the fundamental points about stress is that it tends to affect each individual idiosyncratically. Therefore it seems reasonable to suppose that methods of combating stress will vary from person to person, and it will be to our advantage if some of the methods are tested. The danger when we are stressed is not only the stress itself, but the fact that we do nothing about it. The methods here are simple and straightforward and rarely take much time.

What this book is *not* is a detailed research monograph on stress. Many excellent books of that sort have already been written and the reader is referred to many of those in the accompanying bibliography. More than anything, I hope that this book is *practical*. In doing the research for the book I have been fortunate in having had the help of a wide range health professionals who have told me what they find stressful about their profession and how they cope with stress. Wherever possible I have tried to incorpor-

## PREFACE

ate those factors into the book and they have guided me in what to include and what to leave out. Health professionals care for others all the time. I hope that this book can enable some to care more for themselves. It was enjoyable to write; I hope it is easy to read. I would welcome any comments you have about it.

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