



## Ian Charles Atchison Martin

### Formerly Consultant Psychiatrist, Darlington Memorial Hospital

Ian Martin died on 7 November 2006 after a long illness. In his later post-retirement years he had become almost a recluse, living in Darlington, a single man with but a housekeeper to see to his needs.

Ian died at the age of 72. Born in Nuneaton in the '30s, and an only child,

he never married. He attended Wolverhampton Grammar School before entering Leeds University Medical School where he graduated MB ChB in 1958. After a spell of National Service during which he was posted to Netley Hospital, the Army psychiatric unit in Southampton, he obtained a post in Leeds, obtaining his DPM and FRCPsych in 1978 and working with Professor Max Hamilton, before obtaining a consultant post at Darlington Memorial Hospital. He was a founder member of the Royal College of Psychiatrists in 1971, and later acquired the certificate of the Society of Medical and Dental Hypnotists. His main interest was

in the use of relaxation therapies for the treatment of neuroses. He published a book *Art and Practice of Relaxation* (Teach Yourself Books, 1977) and a tape on relaxation through hypnotherapy, both of which were well received.

Ian enjoyed travelling to overseas conferences. We first met during National Service at Netley Hospital and formed a lifelong friendship, travelling together to meetings as far afield as Hawaii, Osaka in Japan, Athens and Mexico City. Ian will be missed.

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## reviews

### Reading about self-help books on cognitive– behavioural therapy for anxiety disorders

Cognitive–behavioural therapy (CBT) emerged in the 1970s and '80s as an imperfect amalgam of cognitive and behavioural therapy, and is by its very nature a changing entity. Today it means something very different than it did a generation ago. Alongside the development of CBT has been the change in self-help books that use CBT principles. Books concerned with the treatment of anxiety are a prime example of this evolution. There is now a huge range of self-help materials to choose from, and both service users and professionals can find the choice overwhelming. Here I select some of the more pertinent, popular and helpful publications. First I describe some data from service users which provide their perspective, then I describe the properties of a good self-help guide and give some examples. I end with recommendations for further relevant self-help resources.

### Readers' survey

I contacted No Panic, an organisation for people with anxiety problems, to ask for feedback from members on self-help guides for anxiety. They were asked to list the books they had used, describe their good and bad points, and to rate several statements that reflected attitudes towards self-help guides. Eleven members of the organisation completed the exercise. Clearly with such a small sample size, their responses might not be indicative of the population as a whole, but they provide initial insights into the perception of self-help materials by people with anxiety disorders.

What was first evident from this small study was the number of guides that were mentioned – 24 in total. Only a few books were cited by more than one person, whereas an assorted range of diverse books were only encountered by one person each. The three most commonly read books in this sample were *Simple, Effective Treatment of Agoraphobia* (1977, 1995) and *Self-Help for Your Nerves* (1962, 1995), both by Claire Weekes and *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway!* by Susan Jeffers (1988, 2007). Claire Weekes' books have clearly stood the test of time as they received almost exclusively positive comments from readers who described her as an experienced, compassionate and helpful writer, although some expressed a reservation that her style was somewhat out of date. Susan Jeffers' book was also positively received in general, but some found the style to be too eager, with often unrealistic examples targeted towards an American audience. Some of the assorted 'gems' cited by individuals received glowing reviews. Examples were *Beyond Fear* by Dorothy Rowe (2002), *Fears, Phobias and Panic* by Maureen Sheehan and *In Stillness Conquer Fear* by Pauline McKinnon (1987, 2000). The books that received negative comments in this survey tended to be the more academic self-help books that were regarded as too distant and included unnecessary information, for example *Living with Fear* by Isaac Marks (1978, 2005).

From the survey it was possible to identify the key positive and negative properties of self-help guides (Box 1).

The statements on attitudes towards self-help guides also shed light on the readers' approach to these books. In order to analyse responses, a rating of 50% or more was counted as an endorsement of the statement. Of the 11 readers, 9 believed that 'No self-help guides are perfect, but I can gain something new

#### Box 1. Positive and negative points of self-help guides

##### Positive points

- Easy to read
- Really understands with compassion
- Encouraging and optimistic
- Up-to-date information and style
- Explained why avoidance makes things worse
- Section on building assertiveness
- Practical steps provided
- Realistic
- Helps me understand myself
- Helps me realise I am not going mad
- Author identifies with the reader as a normal human being
- Can easily 'dip in'
- Helps me to soothe myself
- Includes real vignettes or interviews
- Author has been through anxiety
- Useful medical information

##### Negative points

- Patronising, impersonal or distant
- Only applies to a small range of anxieties
- Goals for the reader are not relevant to me
- Too basic
- Too 'spiritual'
- Too much irrelevant information
- Need to already be on the road to recovery for this to be helpful
- Dwells on the symptoms so much that I imagine that I have them
- Not personalised to my difficulties
- Unconvincing case examples

form each one that I read.' Nevertheless, 6 of those surveyed endorsed the statement 'I am on the look-out for a self-help guide that will provide me with the perfect answer to all my problems'. This shows a mixed pattern of expectations of what a self-help guide can offer. Consistent with the professional view of the role