

**Review by Dr Stephen Turner**



## **‘The Handbook of Spiritual Care in Mental Illness’**

**Dr Jo Barber & Rev Carol Wilson: second edition (2015)**

**Published by Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust**

Available from [spiritual.care@bsmhft.nhs.uk](mailto:spiritual.care@bsmhft.nhs.uk)

The question of how best to approach the discussion of spiritual and religious matters with patients is one that provokes a great deal of anxiety, particularly amongst NHS staff. Such discussions could be perceived or misperceived as being akin to evangelism, and there have been a number of high-profile cases in the media where such discussions have led to patient complaints, or disagreements around the question of what is and is not acceptable. Ultimately, these questions and disagreements relate to the establishment of appropriate boundaries.

In this useful handbook, the authors give useful guidance in how to establish these boundaries through proper discussion with the patient, and consideration of the ethical framework within which NHS staff need to operate.

Within psychiatry, questions about religion and spirituality are of particular sensitivity, since many patients are suffering from religious delusions, and the line can become blurred between what is a culturally normal belief, and what could be considered a symptom of mental illness. It can be difficult to navigate these turbulent waters, particularly with patients who may be acutely distressed.

The authors provide useful guidance around how best to approach these questions diplomatically, and with the wellbeing of the patient being at the core of their approach. They do not shy from asserting the need for the spiritual wellbeing of a patient to be taken into account at an early stage of the development of the care plan. However, they do so in a thoughtful and tactful way, providing simple examples of how best to support patients with an existing faith, as well as those simply seeking a better understanding of the nature and meaning of their suffering.

This short handbook is helpful in providing a set of guidelines to assist healthcare providers in approaching these sensitive questions, and is to be warmly recommended.