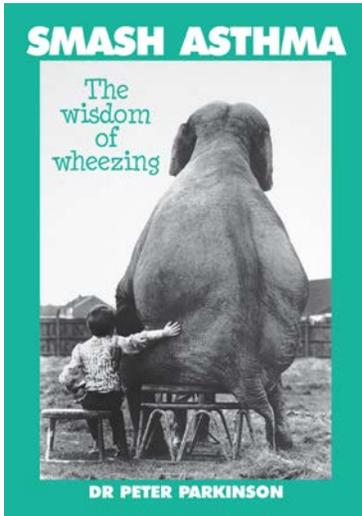


Book Review



Smash Asthma: The wisdom of wheezing

by Dr Peter Parkinson

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Reviewed by Caril Cowan

I am excited by this book for several reasons. Firstly, it incorporates the physiology of the work of psychodrama in a way that I do not think has been done before. Secondly, the examination of asthma through case studies identifies and challenges the co-dependency between medicine and the pharmaceutical industry. This is done with humility, but also with the rigour of a scientifically trained medical practitioner using his knowledge, professional experience and rational deduction. Thirdly, there is a memoir aspect to the writing that steps the reader through the author's thinking and the complex medical aspects in an easy understandable way. The style is lyrical and entertaining. Read over coffee or tea and one can almost imagine chatting and laughing with the author.

Peter has had a long career in this work. He was trained in the scientific method. He is well used to critiquing research and distinguishing knowledge from suppositions. He brings this to his medical practice, combined with the wisdom of medical staff from yesteryear: 'listen to the patient'. Additionally, he explores the placebo effect and the adjunct effects of kind and loving attention. He combines scientific knowledge and logic to formulate a range of hypotheses, which he then tests. I love the discussion of the alveoli sphincters: "I ... can't imagine that the body ... (has) 800,000 very intricate and complicated sets of muscles and glands, for the sole purpose of making a disease called asthma. It just does not make sense." I have never considered how many alveoli I have, yet my life is dependent on their healthy functioning!

The theme of adrenal exhaustion/depletion and stimulating the adrenal matrix is intriguing. The blood levels of adrenalin in people attending accident and emergency departments have been measured and most people have high levels of adrenalin. Unexpectedly, people with asthma have very

low levels. The first response to such information is to assume that this is an aspect of the illness to be corrected by medical intervention. However, Peter kept asking important questions and made unexpected links. People with asthma may have excellent reasons to have 'turned off' their adrenal matrix. During psychodrama enactment, Peter and his trainers and colleagues identified body responses consistent with adrenal collapse or 'turnoff'. With integrative catharsis, the adrenal matrix can be stimulated and kicked back into action. A stunning example is described on page 169: "Pat's 5'3" being had ... totally regressed to the terrified and wheezing 11 year old ... she took an enormous breath." It takes about 30 seconds for the blood to circulate around the body, so it takes about 30 seconds "for her to turn from wheezing, pale and blueish to bright scarlet and scream 'HELL NO'." He sees evidence of the adrenal system being turned on. This woman's asthma was cured. She now supplied her own adrenalin.

This book is about so much more than just asthma and wheezing. A subtitle to the main title would better reflect the breadth of coverage of the book. Acutely aware of the need to measure the effectiveness of psychodrama, Peter has computerised the family/whanau/social atom. This enables clients to review how their relationships are changing to include more 'good' people in their lives, while setting limits and distancing from unwanted people. Carefully stepping the reader through the process with many examples, Peter demonstrates the graphing a person's functioning in psychodrama sessions and the related role development. Points such as when there is no suicide risk and when the person is ready to be discharged are identified.

This book is an exceptional addition to psychodrama's body of work. If you are exploring psychosomatic roles, you need to read this book. If you want to demonstrate the effectiveness of your practice and you are working with individual people or a group, you will do well to explore the family/whanau/social atom scorer.

Book available online at resourcebooks.co.nz

