

Book Review

Title: *Leave No Nurse Behind: Nurses Working with disAbilities*

Author: Donna Maheady

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Reviewer: Alice Tse, PhD, APRN, RN

This is a collection of eleven inspirational stories of nurses finding purpose when disability strikes later in life. It is a rich ethnography of the psychological battle and societal reactions of several individual nurses living with a disability. This book presents an interesting oxymoron; nursing as a helping profession outright rejects those who fight to enter the discipline. Eleven different nurses describe the denial to accessing the profession that they admired and sought, the frustration, and their breakthrough to rediscover their own creative expression and professional engagement. The issue in common was always how to assist the able bodied receiver (e.g., administrator, employer, counselor) to see Abilities without having their disAbility become blinders for the other. In addition to having to face the intricacies of regular working requirements, these nurses mustered the energy and persistence to negotiate through well-intended systems that hindered rather than helped via the intention of “helping” those of their own with disAbilities. The result is a fascinating book, which examines how nursing, as a seemingly “caring” profession, still strongly creates its own mainstream culture.

The individuals in the text each describe how they experienced an unconscious effort of the “caring profession’s” attempts to maintain its standards by rejecting their joining into the profession because of their disabilities, even after they had been nurses. Overall the text describes an interplay between individuals who, for the most part, create and propose their own accommodations and those members of the profession whose good intentions end up restricting rather than accommodating. All of this takes an inordinate amount of energy that could be better spent providing quality patient care.

Disability makes non-disabled people anxious. Although nursing is deemed a “caring” discipline, the professional stance taken by the nursing profession is not friendly to individuals with disabilities. The individuals in this book describe transformations they undergo while pursuing their nursing dreams/careers. Each nurse choosing to enter the profession had no prior role model. As each story is told through each author’s experience, the text integrates an undercurrent of the disability world within the nursing profession. The authors provide an analysis of how professionalism and activism mesh to create something new; that is, the realization that it is possible for the person with a disability to be a health care professional.

Attempts of a profession to maintain its “standards” can happen to any discipline. The text sheds insight into why for so long nurses with disabilities have been missing from the nursing profession. The common thread to each author’s description is garnering their own professional survival in a restrictive and unbending culture.

A strength of this book is the ability of the authors to address issues associated with reclaiming his/her own life, navigating and facing the uncertainty of not knowing what is coming next. Issues of vulnerability are subtly brought out. Although this text does not offer any new medical knowledge, it serves as a positive resource on disability culture. Many disability theories are developed in universities and via research. The text incorporates the real-life daily stories of nurses with disabilities as a legitimate voice as a source of knowledge within a culture of professionals.

The appendices broaden awareness of reciprocal responsibilities between nurses and their employers. They provide a sample accommodation request letter, guidance on the action of disclosing, dealing with difficult supervisors, and selected resources. The application of this array of samples is referred to in the text.

Although the book is written for nurses with disabilities who wish to join the discipline or change their activities within it, the concepts are applicable to individuals who want to join the ranks of any profession. The message is clearly that disability does not mean the end. Rather it is the beginning; how it is handled will inform and shape the disciplines’ practices.

This book is highly recommended for those seeking mentorship while facing stigma and discrimination. It provides an inspiration and practical guide for nurses and students with disabilities. The concepts addressed are applicable to individuals of other professions who have the ability to successfully meet the hurdles put forth by their discipline as well.