

## Sexual Health: An Australian Perspective

Meredith Temple-Smith and Sandra Gifford (Editors)

IP Communications Melbourne (2005)

335 pp, including index

ISBN 0-9752374-1-1

The Preface to this book states, ‘...it is important that the focus on sexual health emphasises the health part of the equation, by defining sexual health as more than just the absence of disease. Thus, this book focuses more on health than on illness’. This claim is frequently made in books, articles, lectures, workshops and presentations. It is rare that the claim is justified. The writer or speaker, having made the statement that she or he will concentrate on sexual *health*, gives one of the many definitions of sexual health and, political correctness having thus been served, will devote all the remaining time or space to sexual *ill health*. This is not surprising. There are plenty of concrete examples of sexual ill health in Australia and overseas to talk about, whereas ‘health’ is a much more nebulous concept. All health workers (sexual health physicians included) are infinitely more comfortable concentrating on disease than we are talking up and promoting health.

The editors of this all-Australian text are to be congratulated for having lived up to their claim, or at least having lived up to it infinitely more ably than anyone else has ever succeeded in doing. All the contributors have done their best to focus on health and wellness rather than disease, except in Part 3 ‘Biological and Physiological Threats to Sexual Health’ where the emphasis is obviously and, by definition, on pathology. This part contributes a mere 24 pages to the full text, however. The editors have the balance about right in my opinion.

As there really *is* an emphasis on health in this text, the content has a freshness and a depth of thought rarely encountered in books today. There are many examples scattered throughout the book and it is Susan Moore in her chapter on ‘Sexuality: Psychological Perspectives’ who perhaps captures it best when she calls for and outlines ‘a new model which focuses on sexual wellbeing’. After a well summarised discussion of the various psychological theories of sexuality she points out their inherent weakness by stating, ‘Each of the theoretical frameworks discussed so far emphasizes how we are *constrained*, rather than how we choose to act sexually’ (my italics). Exactly! The point is made (by many of the contributors) that really looking at sexual *health* and sexual health promotion and focussing on sexual wellness rather than disease will generate new research questions which are simply crying out to be taken up.

Notable features of the book are the high standard of the writing and the even quality of the chapters. There are no opaque and jargon-riddled pages to perplex the reader. While it is unfair to pick and choose it is part of the ‘poetic licence’ of a book reviewer to be able to say what parts most appealed to him personally. My favourite chapters, and the ones I learned most from, were chapters 5 (psychological perspectives), 10 (men’s and women’s business), 12 (behind bars), 14 (sex and sex-ability), 18 (health policy), 19 (the role of law)—it’s worth the average sexual health practitioner buying the book just for this one; and Rob Moodie’s conclusion, which is so peppered with eminently quotable one-liners and two-liners that it’s almost worth memorising line by line (e.g. ‘having sex is promoted, having sex healthily is not’, ‘Australia is ambivalent about sex’, ‘there are no waiting lists for prevention’ and ‘governments...in general respond to concerted, unified and persistent advocacy’). But, all the chapters are good and not one detracts from the tone or lowers the overall quality of the book.

If I think this book is so great (and I do), what are its failings? Not many really. The historical bits fail to mention my heroine Ettie Rout. I always think it is unforgivable that she is so often overlooked in discussions about the history of sexual health in Australasia. Any woman who could write during the First World War, ‘if the Dean of Lincoln is satisfied with Religion as a sort of secondary sexual experience, that’s his affair, but the average soldier is built differently, and there’s no use perpetually nagging him about his ‘private parts’. I am sick of all this sex-taboo nonsense’,<sup>1</sup> should never ever be forgotten, particularly as she was born in Tasmania and lived much of her life in New Zealand. There should by rights be a statue of her in Wellington and Hobart. At least Ettie would appreciate this new text, even if it has taken almost a century for her trail blazing promotion of sexual health (rather than disease) to come to fruition. There are a couple of very minor editing oversights—there’s a missing reference (Simmons and Mills 1998) on page 237, Skov has become Svov in the references on pages 254 and 261; and Skene’s glands in fact drain into the female urethra and are not tiny remnants of the withering away of the female ducts in the male urethra as stated on page 75. As you can see, I have had to look really hard and become a nit-picker to find any errors or deficiencies at all.

Every professional should buy this book. It should be sent to politicians, health bureaucrats, educators, teachers, allied health workers, medical and nursing students and every registered doctor and nurse in the land. The trouble is that readers need to be prepared to think about its message; thinking rationally about sex is difficult, challenging and sometimes even dangerous to one's peace of mind. Given that fact, those of us who agree with its core thesis (and surely that should be everyone who reads the journal *Sexual Health*) need to redouble our efforts to 'effectively communicate' with our peers, our clients, our relatives and friends and to provide

'concerted, unified and persistent advocacy for sexual health' here in relaxed and comfortable Australia.

### References

- 1 Tollerton J. Ettie. A life of Ettie Rout. Auckland: Penguin; 1992, p. 171.

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## A Gay Man's Guide to Prostate Cancer

Gerald Perlman and Jack Drescher (Editors)  
Haworth Medical Press (2005)  
183 pp, including index  
ISBN 10: 1-56023-553-5

This book provides a comprehensive overview of the issues confronting gay men with prostate cancer and the challenges faced by health professionals involved in their care. The material is well researched and presented in a format that is easy to understand and readable to both the professional and layman. It is up to date and current and covers the full spectrum of prostate cancer issues.

These issues include screening and diagnosis, treatment and after care, the emotional impact and the influence on self esteem and body image. The book explores the medical issues, personal impact and social consequences of a prostate cancer diagnosis focussing on how these have specific consequences for gay men. The material is delivered from a range of perspectives including that of health professionals, gay clinicians and personal experiences. This spectrum of opinions provides a diversity of views and allows the reader to gain a deeper understanding of many of the challenges faced by gay men with prostate cancer in the modern world.

Such a well written resource would provide gay men and their partners with the understanding and information to better cope in a system and culture still predominantly targeted toward mainstream community and still 'uncomfortable' and generally poorly informed with the specific needs of gay men.

As a health professional directly involved in providing support to men with prostate cancer, this book has opened my eyes to many concerns previously not well understood. It has raised awareness for me about a range of specific concerns experienced by gay men that need closer attention and improved resourcing. It has also highlighted some unique deficiencies amongst health care providers that require closer attention and more enthusiastic focus.

I would recommend this book to any gay man, at any age, diagnosed with prostate cancer. This book will enable these men to be better equipped to cope with the many facets of prostate cancer and know they are not alone in their journey.

I would also urge health professionals involved in the care of all men with prostate cancer to take up the challenge this book offers, as they stand to gain a greater insight into the issues that are important to gay men and as a result provide a more compassionate and appropriate standard of care.

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