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### **Cynthia Faulkner and Samuel Faulkner, Addictions counselling: A competency-based approach**

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Addictions Counselling: A competency-based approach.

Faulkner A and Faulkner S

Oxford University Press, New York

237 Pages including index.

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No cover price indicated.

The business of supporting recovery from drug and alcohol problems is both complex and hotly debated. With over 200 named talking therapies the meaning of “counselling” is often questioned. Recovery from substance use problems appears possible without necessarily engaging in helping or treatment services. Consequently a book on counselling skills must be considered within these parameters.

Helpfully, Faulkner and Faulkner have produced a counselling text structured around the competencies recognised by three of the major counselling validation bodies in the USA, which are outlined in some detail. These competencies are illustrated throughout most of the book by the presentation of a case study plotting the progress of a female problem drug user and outlining the skills/competencies being used by the counsellor at each stage of engagement.

The book’s strengths lie in outlining screening/assessment procedures, structured assessment methods questionnaires eg Addiction Severity Index and bio-psycho-social assessment, to name only two. The counselling sessions, as evidenced by the case study provide clear structure, including reflection on progress and planning.

Crucially, the importance of the counsellor as an accountable professional, to the agency and other statutory bodies, is emphasised through clear guidance on high quality record keeping. These themes are clearly expressed and would stand counsellors in good stead, anywhere.

This book reflects the cultural perspectives on addiction within the USA, which may not be supported elsewhere.

The book is weak in offering theoretical perspectives or direction as a basis for counselling, other than the stated competencies. Four theoretical perspectives are covered in as many pages, without an obvious link to counselling. Family therapy is referred to as an aspect of the counselling process. However this form of therapy requires a level of training beyond the remit of this book. Further other more brief but as effective family focussed interventions are omitted e.g. CRAFT (Community Reinforcement and Family Training).

Abstinence is the clear focus of achievement whilst harm reduction, an approach widely adopted is barely mentioned, other than as an emerging debate. (In other countries a harm reduction perspective is central to service design and intervention methods.) Consequently there is a strong emphasis in the text and in the counselling vignettes of the importance of an abstinence goal, 12 step group attendance “30 meetings in 30 days” and “twice a day” if need be, in addition to the counselling sessions.

Drug effects and diverse cultural groups are covered very briefly, the latter clearly relevant to USA. Whilst this book may appear to attempt to cover too much, it may also be viewed a useful introduction to addiction counselling, particularly in regard to competencies. However the context for its usefulness appears to be the USA, reflecting its perspectives on addiction and service structures, and not Europe or UK where there are clearer policy and practice guidance, and competence development which focuses on harm reduction as an important element of recovery.

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