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BOOK REVIEW**Solution Focused Interactions in Nursing: Growth and Change**

Steve W. Smith

Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2021, 175 pages, ISBN 978-1527563469, £58.99 hardback

Review by David Hains

 President of the Australasian Solution Focused Association, and coordinator of the Adelaide SFBT Community of Practice

For me it just makes sense, but that's coming from a bloke who is both a nurse and a solution focused nut. The solution focused approach sits so beautifully with the core tenets of nursing, and it was about time for another book on the subject. I was excited and asked to review the book as soon as I heard about it. The first Road Sign (*Andante ma non troppo*) occurred when Dr. Plamen Panayotov had begun his psychiatry internship in 1984. His trainer focused on the patient's goals and not on their symptoms. Further examples of this orientation were demonstrated by a mental health nurse in 1990.

The first nursing SF book that I read (McAllister, 2007) was a very different read: a multi-contributor text, looking at a solution focused model in various areas of nursing practice. Steve Smith has taken a different approach, building off of his doctoral thesis with a desire to demonstrate the application of a solution focused approach to nursing practice. Hence this book combines his research into nurse education along with clinical applications of the approach.

Smith has been a long-term enthusiast (20+ years) of the Solution Focused Approach, both as a student of the approach, a clinician, and an educator. He told me once of his desire, in the lead up to his retirement, was to "plant the seed that solution focused interactions were relevant in all domains of nursing practice (not just mental health) and that they enabled nurses to deliver high quality nursing care". Has he managed to achieve this?

Initially it was a little hard for me to work out who Smith was writing for, as throughout the book he seems to write from the different perspective of a nurse educator, a researcher, and a clinician. This in itself is not a bad thing as it provides a lot of very different information in the one book. However, the reader may need to consider this when opening the book. I found myself having to go back and re-read several chapters once I realised the structure of the book. Again, this is also not a bad thing (reading a book more than once).

Smith starts off as an educator, aligning the solution focused approach with the role of the nurse (as defined by the United Kingdom Nursing and Midwifery Council and the International Council of Nurses) and with nursing theory (Florence Nightingale, Denise Webster and others). In addition, he also provides general context of health (World Health Organisation) and Person-Centred Care (Carl Rogers). Through the first chapter Smith highlights some important points relating to health, care, and growth, in order to explain that nursing is not just about administering medication (and other practical tasks) but rather is about helping people to grow and change, i.e. "Change from a less healthy state to a more healthy state" (p.3).

In Chapter 1 Smith introduces the phrase "Solution Focused Interactions" which is the title of chapter 3, and this is what I think (as a clinician) is the key to the whole book. Here Smith writes more for and from a clinician's perspective. Nurses generally don't see themselves as therapists/psychotherapists, but in reality the right word said at the right time can make a huge difference in a person's recovery. Nurses have a unique role in healthcare, being the profession who (generally) has the most contact and the most communication with the patient. So, why not use this time, and our voices, to help with the growth/healing/recovery. Throughout the book there are several great examples of how solution focused techniques (for example scaling or the miracle question) can be used in conversation in that natural (non-therapist) way that nurses do their work. Smith also acknowledges that it is sometimes hard for nurses (and most healthcare professionals) to take the "not-knowing stance" which is often a key strategy. While I think all of this is the key to why the book was written, I am left wanting to read more about these practical applications of the approach. Perhaps that's something for the 2nd edition (Steve – surely you will be looking for something to do in your retirement?)

In the middle section of the book Smith writes from a research perspective, with several chapters focused on his Doctoral research where he studied implementing a solution focused approach into nursing knowledge. There is a lot here for the academics and researchers, but perhaps less for the clinicians. I was certainly intrigued by the personal experience of the nurses, but to be honest I started to lose interest in chapter 8 reading about hermeneutic phenomenology. Again this is not a criticism of Smith and his book, but rather it's about me as a clinician who has absolutely no idea what hermeneutics is all about. For some readers however this middle section could be the key reason for the book to be written.

The book concludes by attempting to link the nursing theory, doctoral research, and practical application to nursing education and clinical practice.

Smith's research and book is certainly a valuable addition to both solution-focused and to nursing literature. Smith has certainly "sown the seed" in respect to identifying how solution focused interactions can not only align with the core values of nursing, but also be a practical approach to helping nurse people back to health. He has also provided a valuable research base to implementing a solution focused approach into nursing training. Some (like me) will be drawn to both the clinical application and the personal experiences of the nurses involved in the research, while others (anyone who understands what "hermeneutic phenomenology" means) will be drawn to research and theoretical side. Parts of this book would also have direct relevance to non-nurses i.e. clinicians and educators from a wide variety of disciplines who want to implement solution focused interactions into their education or clinical work.

Overall, there is something for everyone.

References

McAllister, M. (2007). *Solution focused nursing: Rethinking practice*. Palgrave MacMillian.

More background information can be found in this interview with the author: FBS Chat (2021) FBS Chat with Steve Smith <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0bYJjMmR2w>

The reviewer

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