

O'Hare, T. (2007). Essential skills of social work practice. Chicago: Lyceum.

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My background as a social worker is a collage of micro and macro practice experiences. I have worked in the fields of domestic violence, child welfare, and hospice. While working for a nationwide hospice, I progressed from a "front line" clinical social worker to a National Director of Hospice Development. Regardless of the setting in which I worked, I never encountered a neatly packaged problem or issue and there were no "textbook" cases with prepared solutions.

As a new professor in social work, I strive to have my practice courses reflect the day-to-day experiences of social workers in the field. Thomas O'Hare's *Essential Skills of Social Work Practice* provides students with knowledge regarding basic social work skills, but more importantly, he provides case studies in which he skillfully identifies each and every aspect of the case from both the patient and the practitioner's perspective. It is in these case studies, that students experience the application of the skill sets that they will need each and everyday they work in the field.

The text opens with a clear overview instructing the reader on the connection between assessment, intervention and evaluation. It is the following two chapters that O'Hare distances his text from other introductory practice books, in these two chapters he writes on the connection between research and practice and ethics in social work practice. I have not encountered many texts that give both of these topics the same prominence that is found in this book. He communicates the importance of these issues to the reader prior to discussion the "essential practice skills". Typically, in my experience, topics such as research and ethics are discussed as separate but important issues in practice.

Chapters four through seven outline, in exceptional detail, skills such as conducting an

assessment, supportive skills, therapeutic coping skills and case management skills. As with Part I of the book, it is in his detail that O'Hare distinguishes himself and his attention to topics that other authors ignore at worst or minimally mention at best. His chapter on case management skills outlines the essence of casework and, at the same time, uses cases from various social work fields to illustrate his points to the reader.

Another unique direction taken by O'Hare is his delving into several disorder classifications and for each disorder grouping he takes the reader from assessment to intervention to evaluation. He uses case examples for each of these specific discussions. It is in his attention to detail and the methodical way in which he conducts the cases that illustrate the application of each of the concepts previously discussed in the book.

He concludes the book with a chapter on evidence-based practice. I was hoping that he applied the same level of rigor and analysis to this subject as his previous topics, however, I find this chapter somewhat lacking. O'Hare identifies four major objections to conducting evidence-based practices but does so without a great amount of detail or specificity. He then transitions to broader service delivery issues concluding the chapter soon thereafter.

Finally, the appendices of this book include a "psychosocial intervention scale" and a "comprehensive service plan". These tools are indispensable in social work practice, tools that are used to bring clarity to the at times overwhelming nature of the work that we do. In my opinion, this is an excellent text for an upper level undergraduate practice course and/or for a foundational practice course in a MSW program.