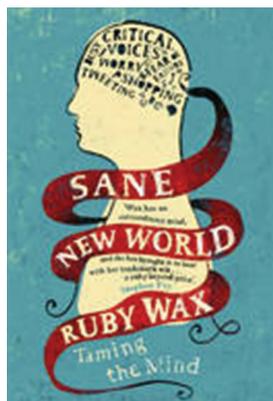


Out of Hours Books

SANE NEW WORLD: TAMING THE MIND RUBY WAX

**Hodder & Stoughton 2013
HB, 272pp, £18.99, 9781444755732**



Ruby Wax is not on the telly so much these days, but in the last few years she has been developing a second career as a campaigner tackling the stigma of mental illness: as the 'face of depression' for Comic Relief; through taking a successful road show 'Live from the Priory' (in association with Depression Alliance) to the West End; and through helping to set up the 'Black Dog Tribe' social networking site for people with depression.

This book, written following completion of an MA in Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy at Oxford with the doyen of MBCT Mark Williams, promotes MBCT for depression, and mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn at the University of Massachusetts, for a wider range of mental health problems. However, she states that the book is not exclusively for the '1 in 4' of us who will have mental health problems at some point in our lives, but for the '4 in 4', that is, everyone, because, she contends 'we're all vulnerable, all delicate creatures under our tough fronts'.

While stating it's for everyone might help

boost sales of the book, I'm concerned that it won't appeal to anyone who doesn't share her world view, which seems to assume that we all suffer from crippling self-criticism, fear of failure, and an unfocused drive for frenetic activity in our daily lives in order to prove ourselves as a result. She promotes this view with frequent references to her own story, blaming her pervasive 'critical voices' on her childhood (particularly her mother), and lacing the text with abrasive jokes which I think unfortunately, are mostly not as funny as I know she can be.

She argues the need to cultivate a greater awareness of our lives from moment to moment, because living on 'automatic pilot' can lead us into habitual maladaptive responses, but I think she goes too far, using hyperbole which I find unconvincing and which puts me on the defensive. For example, she contends that these days we are all 'loaded up to the brim' with automatic reactions to stress, and:

'... in a constant downpour of adrenaline and cortisol, muscle tension, high blood pressure and lack of oxygen to the brain; all of which can make us very, very ill.'

I find her in-your-face style unattractive, and fear that some readers won't be able to empathise and stick with her long enough to reach the later sections of the book, on mindfulness-based techniques, which are very well described and paint a picture of the possibility of altering the way we react emotionally to our thoughts and fears, which I think would be novel and appealing to many. She describes several exercises, such as paying attention to our breathing, or focusing on the sensations and movements of parts of our body, which through daily practice can help us deal with negative automatic thoughts, noticing them and observing them for what they are, but without reacting to them in a self-critical way.

Is this a book to recommend to our patients struggling with anxiety and depression? I don't think it succeeds as well as other self-help books I have read as, besides the potentially off-putting self-obsession and assumed belief running through the early parts, there are rather difficult-to-read sections listing the parts of the brain, and the many research studies which have now been published on mindfulness. These sections for me are dealt with too superficially, use too much unexplained jargon (such as PET scans and fMRI), and I think would distract readers from the central message of the book. It's a difficult balance, giving information in an understandable format without talking down to your audience, and I would worry that this book would pose more questions than provide answers to many lay readers.

Tony Kendrick,

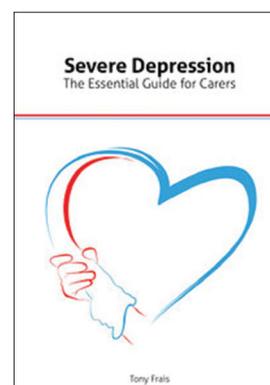
Professor of Primary Care, University of Southampton.

E-mail: A.R.Kendrick@Southampton.ac.uk

DOI: 10.3399/bjgp13X673801

SEVERE DEPRESSION: THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE FOR CARERS TONY FRAIS

**Anthony T Frais 2013
PB, 52pp, £6.99, 9780954806842**



This is a short but very helpful booklet written to help people caring or supporting someone with severe depression. Designed to be accessible to a wide audience, it acknowledges that many people who support or live with someone with depression do not

"I'm concerned that this book won't appeal to anyone who doesn't share her world view."
