

BOOK REVIEW

"TILL THE BREAK OF DAY"

A history of Mental Health Services in Singapore, 1841-1993

Author: Dr Ng Beng Yeong

Publisher: Singapore University Press

ISBN: 9971-69-245-7

It is most appropriate that a staff member of Woodbridge Hospital who is directly involved in the care of the mentally ill has undertaken the important task of writing on the history of Mental Health Services in Singapore. The timing is also most appropriate as the old era and the old way of doing things have come to an end when the new Woodbridge Hospital and Institute of Mental Health opened their doors in 1993.

"TILL THE BREAK OF DAY" records not only historical facts of psychiatric care but also within memory, personal anecdotes of staff members who were like a big family at work and in recreation.

Dr Ng Beng Yeong had taken three years to research and write the book. The book covers the period between 1841 and 1993 i.e. the beginning of recognition of the mentally ill to the closure of the old Woodbridge Hospital. His effort is commendable.

Dr Chen Ai Ju, the former Director of Medical Services, Ministry of Health, Singapore, December 1998, wrote in the Foreword:

"It captures a wealth of information regarding the development of clinical psychiatry in Singapore. It provides better understanding for all mental health workers and is a useful reference for the planning of future psychiatric services and the assessment of mental health care as we move into the new era of psychiatry in Singapore with the rebuilding of Woodbridge Hospital and the establishment of the Institute of Mental Health."

Prof Gordon Parker, the first Research Director of The Institute of Mental Health, Singapore (1998-2000), and Head, School of Psychiatry, University of New South Wales wrote:

Dr Ng has written an informative and detailed history of an issue of national importance. Psychiatry is a discipline continually facing stigma, and its history is often ignored on such a basis. Dr Ng's history, and his clear advocacy of the advance made in Singapore psychiatry, should inform both general and specialist readers".

This book is therefore recommended to health professionals, medical students, historians interested in the development of medicine and psychiatry, relatives and caregivers of psychiatry patients and the general public with some basic understanding of psychiatry and psychology.

Finally, most of the local psychiatrists are mentioned in names in the book, in one way or another. You would probably be encouraged to get a copy for personal collection.

Dr Chee Kuan Tsee
Woodbridge Hospital/
Institute of Mental Health
10 Buangkok View
Singapore 539747
Tel: 385 0411
Fax: 385 1051