



'Explain Pain' – A review by Margaret Mayo

Authors David Butler and Lorimer Moseley

Art by Sunyata

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In *Explain Pain* Butler and Moseley use illustrations, humour, stories and metaphor as well as careful straightforward description to explain how the impact of advances in neuroscience inform our understanding of the experience of pain. This book explores myths at the same time as it expands the notion that the more we understand what is happening, the less fear we have and the better we are able to find strategies to deal with our situation. It builds on the truism that if we try to take control and listen to ourselves we have the ability as human beings to expand our activities rather than diminish them.

Almost every statement is supported by evidence from clinical trials. Both large population trials and studies using magnetic resonance imaging of the nervous system are cited. The language is simple, clear and vigorous. My first reading of the first chapter was that the language 'talked down' to the reader but my second reading made me recognize the need for simple language. A client of mine thought initially that it was a children's book. This is not necessarily a criticism but does alert us to the difficulty of talking about sensations, feelings and connections in our selves where we have an inadequate vocabulary.

There are 6 sections in the book. The first section sets the tone and boundaries. It tells true stories about people's experiences: it provides the context for the rest of the book. Butler and Moseley establish the fact that they are talking about real people and their experiences. The second section describes basic neurology. More than that it puts neurology in the context of how it affects people and why pain is useful. It also brilliantly describes the way in which we are not a group of systems but a whole living being. The metaphor of the brain being an orchestra is simple and clear;

A good orchestra can play all the tunes. And can easily learn more tunes. However if the orchestra plays the same tune over and over, it becomes automatic, it goes by memory, it becomes more and more difficult to play any thing else.

Curiosity and creativity becomes lost. (p 40)

I am a little uneasy about the personification of the brain. On p 8, "it will still hurt if your brain thinks you are in danger" and yet, on pp10-11, Descartes, "who invented the mind-body split" (p 11), is consigned to the dustbin. Later we read, "The brain 'weighs the world' and responds by doing many things, one of which is giving you the perception of what is

happening." (p38) Some readers may find the 'brain-you split' eerily similar to the 'mind-body split'. It is a useful metaphor when recognised as such.

Section three describes graphically what happens when tissues are damaged. Colourful stories are told to illustrate injury and healing in our bones, joints, discs (living adaptable force transducers), muscles, peripheral nerves, connective tissue and skin. Our entire being is involved in this process. Section four incorporates descriptions of the central and autonomic nervous systems. The roles of the endocrine and immune systems are explored. The final chapter in this section puts movement habits into the context of the general pain response. Section five describes the bewildering dead end in which many people with constant pain find themselves. The advice in the book is clear. Demand answers from your chosen practitioner but "avoid total dependence on your practitioner. You must take control." (p94)

Management essentials is the title of the introduction to section six. Again, no particular treatment is recommended:

There are many other tools which may help different people at different times. For example medication, diet, skilled attention to damaged tissues, cognitive and behavioural therapy, relaxation strategies, love. (p 108)

Butler & Moseley are explicit:

Our focus here is on education, knowledge, understanding and movement. (p 108)

The stages along the road to recovery are postulated as *tools*. It is a work image. Despite the easy language, humour and Sunyata's brilliant illustrations there is no suggestion that this is an easy road. This book bridges the gap between people's experience and neuroscience. It is written for every one. I strongly recommend it to all practitioners whatever their expertise and to any body whose pain is playing the loudest tune.

Explain Pain can be ordered via the internet at www.noigroup.com/ep.

Margaret Mayo
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