

# AAIMHI Newsletter

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### Guidelines for contributors

AAIMHI aims to publish three editions per year in March, July and November. Contributions to the newsletter are invited on any matter of interest to the members of AAIMHI.

Referenced works should follow the guidelines provided by the APA Publication Manual 4<sup>th</sup> Edition.

All submissions are sub-edited to newsletter standards.

Articles are accepted preferably as Word documents sent electronically.

Send to Shelley Reid at email:

[shelleyreid2@bigpond.com](mailto:shelleyreid2@bigpond.com)

#### Editorial inquiries:

Shelley Reid

0428 425 022

[shelleyreid2@bigpond.com](mailto:shelleyreid2@bigpond.com)

or [shelley.reid@email.cs.nsw.gov.au](mailto:shelley.reid@email.cs.nsw.gov.au)

Postal address:

The Editor, AAIMHI Newsletter

PO Box 39

Double Bay NSW 1360

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## The *Growing Up Solid* conference: Reflections of a National AAIMHI President and State committee member

Hosting a national conference – my associations to that phrase as the President of AAIMHI-WA branch three years ago were mostly of trepidation, some cautious excitement, a sense of responsibility, and plenty of ‘what if’s?’ When I put it to our state committee there were but a few seconds of ‘digestive silence’ followed by unanimous support and soon we went into full swing with somewhat grandiose plans for a four- or five-day conference. What a fantastic committee, I was overawed at their courage and energy. Well, we have done just that: hosted the 2011 National Conference, this time in partnership with the WA Chapter of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatry and over a more realistic three days.

Our first AAIMHI conference planning meeting was held in November 2008 and from there a ‘wants and needs’ survey of our WA member base was initiated. Members were asked to suggest issues they would like as the focus and speakers they were interested in hearing from as well as the style of conference. By March 2009 we had a fair idea that we were never going to suit everyone and that the wheels of change in the field were so fast that it was hard to keep up. We also asked each other what we needed to do to make coming out west attractive for AAIMHI’s eastern states members. Attachment theory, parenting practices, environmental influences, prevention and interventions were dominant themes in our local survey. Arietta Slade and Astrid Berg were specifically named as desired presenters. We approached both as we thought they would appeal to members all over Australia. Astrid accepted and we were on our way. Arietta was unavailable, although with the vagaries of life later became available and was snapped up for another conference to be held in Australia just six months earlier than ours – we seriously considered changing the dates of our conference to make this work. As sanity prevailed we decided to build upon Arietta’s visit by inviting Michelle Sled to present research and to train in coding for Reflective Functioning on the Parent Development Interview. Michelle accepted and our conference was start-

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### ***The Growing Up Solid conference (cont.)***

ing to take shape. We now wanted someone to satisfy some of the identified needs and Karlen Lyons-Ruth did just that. She was also prepared to travel to us and to bring Elisa Bronfman with her to provide training in the use of the AMBIANCE measure. YES! We all breathed a sigh of relief as we recognized that each of us on the committee would willingly travel east for this line-up so surely members will travel west. We didn't look back, although we had many anxious moments such as the news that Michelle Slead and her partner were pregnant for the first time and then later that they were expecting twins. How was she to manage all that and to keep her commitment to us? Again I was overawed at the courage and commitment from the people in this field. Michelle had booked her room in Perth complete with two bassinets.

The needs analysis process revealed to us that there was going to be a huge amount of activity in the west in 2011. Events that would bring publicity to Perth later in the year were embraced, for example, CHOGM announced Perth as its venue and the Olympic committee announced Fremantle as the site for Olympic sailing trials. We learned too that the RANZCP Faculty of Child Psychiatry were planning to hold their conference in Perth and were willing to consider a collaborative venture. It seemed all too easy to combine. Initially there was some hesitancy, but concerns disappeared when we looked at each other's plans and were delighted to see how they really did dovetail well. As a result of this collaboration, Professor Sir Robin Murray was added to our star-studded line up. The AAIMHI/RANZCP partnership worked well; there was mutual respect and recognition of individual strengths and a great deal of creativity. In this spirit we actively grew the creative stream for the conference, beginning with the spirituality and genius of Helen Milroy for our conference emblem and flowing into our programming. Shaun Tan accepted an invitation to present and again kept this commitment even in the light of the pressure that must have followed his Oscar win. National and local presentations flowed in, with many of these of a very creative nature and our closing panel on infant rights gave more in this spirit.

As I reflect upon our journey bringing this conference to fruition, I look back upon those early associations to find that 'what ifs' had become 'so what'; trepidation had become optimism. The responsibility felt truly shared and I have an enormous respect for the talent, generosity and commitment of all those involved. I hope that many of you who committed to making the journey enjoyed and appreciated your experiences at the *Growing up Solid* conference in Perth in May 2011.

**Lynn Priddis**

### **BOOK REVIEW 1**

#### **Clinical Skills in Infant Mental Health: The First Three Years**

**2nd Edition 2011**

**by Sarah Mares, Louise Newman and Beulah Warren**

**Publisher: ACER**

This is the second and very welcome edition of the book *Clinical Skills in Infant Mental Health: The first three years*. It has been written for the wide range of professionals working in the area of infant mental health, by three senior clinicians in Australia. From its eye-catching cover (my teenage son picked it up and had a look) to its well thought out presentation of material covering the whole area of infant mental health, it is easy to read for a beginner and a useful reference for a more experienced practitioner.

The contents are arranged in four parts as in the first edition, addressing in turn the clinical framework; clinical presentations – pregnancy and birth, infants and toddlers; clinical presentations – parent and family and in the final part social, cultural and professional issues. It is in this last section that the biggest revisions have occurred with two new chapters, one on the approach to intervention and the second on professional issues vital to our practice – training, supervision, ethics and advocacy. The book is somewhat larger (60 pages); it has retained its glossary as well as updated references throughout the book and as with the first edition, clinical vignettes are used to illustrate the material throughout the book.

From the new by-line to the book *The first three years* this is a book that considers the infant period of development as laying the foundation for psychological, emotional and social functioning and recognises the many influences from attachment theory, psychoanalytic theories, developmental psychology and infant research which have all increased our understanding of "the capacities of the newborn to interact with the environment and to organise the self and experiences in an active way" (p. 5).

As this book has been developed in part from material presented at the NSW Institute of Psychiatry in various courses, particularly the Graduate Diploma and Masters of Perinatal and Infant Mental Health, many of the important influences are clearly and well presented. Part A, the Clinical Framework, sets out in its four chapters the foundation for the later clinical sections. In this first part each chapter is prefaced by the key concepts to be discussed as well as the principles underlying the theory; the first chapters offer an introduction to infant mental health and the importance of attachment theory. There then follows a very compre-

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**Book review 1 (cont.)**

hensive framework about which to think of the assessment of the infant or toddler within their family and context, so some understanding of the difficulties can then be formulated by the clinician. Integral to any assessment is the consideration of what risk is there for this particular infant or young child within this particular relationship; it is a full assessment that will enable the clinician to make well informed decisions that reflect the best interests of the infant and family.

The richness of the clinical sections reflects the experience of the authors and form the heart of the book whether thinking about the transition to parenthood with all its possibilities of psychological disturbance and opportunities for early intervention, or the impact of prematurity, illness or developmental problems to the common difficulties of sleeping and feeding difficulties which are often embedded in the new relationship, or the impact of trauma and its later implications. Later chapters address difficulties more specific to the parents: perinatal mental illness, parents with personality disorder or difficulties with substance abuse, the parents abused as children and finally the adolescent parent. Each chapter again presents the key concepts to be addressed and the factors to be considered in assessment and formulation as well as offering a summary highlighting the complexity of the issues presented.

When I first compared the contents pages of the two editions I was rather surprised that there had not been a specific chapter on intervention in the first edition of the book as so many of the concepts had been integrated throughout the book. In this edition, the authors Louise Newman and Beulah Warren give us a broad introduction to the concept of intervention from universal support for all families, through to specialist or continuing interventions that support families with their different and often complex needs. They highlight the conceptualisation of therapeutic change by Stern-Bruschweiler and Stern that an intervention at any one point of the family system, for example, a change in the parent's behaviour, leads to change in both the infant's and parent's experience of internal representations and observed behaviours (p.312) which offers to the clinician different possibilities of working with families that will match the clinician's skills and the family's needs. The approaches highlighted in the book will be familiar to many readers, but will inform the newer reader and further references are provided. I was left wanting more from the section on Effectiveness of Infant-Parent Psychotherapy; perhaps this will be expanded in the third edition!

It is with a pointed comment that the therapeutic work with families and infants is difficult and requires specific training and ongoing peer support or supervision, or both (page 322) that we are led into the last chapter written by Sarah Mares on professional issues: training, supervision, ethics and advocacy.

This chapter forms a particularly important addition to the book, as there is a real sense that infant mental health has come of age as a profession and that it is now time to think about what competent professional practice requires; changes seem to be occurring rapidly both socially and technologically, but the infant or toddler remain vulnerable as they do not have a voice of their own. We as professionals may have to offer that voice clinically for the individual infant and family or by taking part in the wider social debate. The author challenges us to ensure that the best interests of the infant or toddler are in mind when considering our role in sometimes very complex situations such as the treatment of sick infants where there is little chance of survival, the infant or young child in the child protection system, or in thinking about families with young children who seek refuge or asylum in Australia.

I would like to end my review with the quote from the start of the book by William Carlos Williams, an American poet and paediatrician:

*Look at them, looking, their eyes meeting the world*

as this is a book that very successfully looks at and engages with the complexities of its subject, *Infant Mental Health: The First Three Years*.

**Janet Rhind**

Brisbane

**BOOK REVIEW 2****Diary of a First-time Mum**

by **Nicole Hall**

**Sydney: Finch Publishing: 2010**

This easy to read, 224-page book is exactly what the title says, an account of the first days, weeks and months with a newborn through to three years. There is only a brief summary of the time before the birth of baby Viv where we read how the author prepared herself for pregnancy, labour and birth; a little window into the author's conscientious approach to being a parent.

The book begins on the day Nicole's baby boy was born. This day was outlined in detail as was each day of the first month. The entries drop away to one or two accounts each week until six months and then one or two accounts per month until one year. The remaining 35 pages give an overview of the second and third year, snapshots which include the birth of her second son, Monty, when Viv was 20 months. The weighting of the book seems appropriate, for it is those first few days, weeks and months which are so confronting for a new mother.

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**Book review 2 (cont.)**

On completion of the book I was left feeling optimistic about new families in Australia. This is a book written by a well-educated professional woman who, together with her husband, had a three-month period of no alcohol, no sugar and no processed food prior to conceiving her child – quite apart from the duration of her pregnancy. Nicole has an extremely supportive husband and family on both sides. She was booked in with a private obstetrician. It seemed she was set up for a trouble-free experience.

It is the candour with which Nicole discusses the huge adjustment to the baby's arrival and the unknowns experienced which make this book appealing. On the day of the birth she speaks of wandering around their home trying to decide whether or not the contractions warranted going to the hospital yet – the sense of not knowing what is happening and what to expect. There is also a confession of not feeling ready for the actual birth, only being prepared for the labouring part of it and an admission of being "scared, scared of the unknown". Eventually, the 'miracle' of the birth, the awareness of the birth of a beautiful boy, a perfect child and the mixture of wonder and shock, occurs.

There is disappointment at not having a chance to put her baby to the breast before a midwife, without asking, put 'her boob and the baby's head together', even though she was pleased that baby was sucking effectively. There is also delight when events flow smoothly.

The author speaks openly of her emotional roller coaster of the first three years, and her responses to the challenges of one, and then two boys. Her difficulty understanding the behaviour of her first son is a theme that runs through the book - the night waking from nine to twelve months which the parents addressed with their own form of 'controlled crying'. There were the physically exhausting early months with two children, a newborn and a toddler, less than two years old. There was the aggression of Viv toward his little brother, especially when Nicole was trying to breast feed the baby; and her shock at her instinctive response to Viv when he hit his little brother before she could get to him.

The author's relief is palpable when she shares the change in Viv following surgery to remove his adenoids and insert grommets. There was evidence that his hearing improved, his breathing normalized and his aggressive behaviour dramatically reduced.

She takes us through the painful process of handing over her precious baby, Monty, to have his 'tied tongue' snipped, the effort to help him manage wind, and the guilt experienced when she left her baby of 11 months alone on the change table to attend to the toddler, when he tumbled onto the floor and broke his arm. Several times she identifies her feelings of being a 'bad mother'.

Many new mothers will identify with the constant challenge of the first baby. Throughout the book Nicole wrote honestly about her anxieties, how small concerns were often difficult to deal with, and how she and her partner resolved issues as they occurred. She wrote of her desire to return to work and the anxiety as she planned to leave Viv with grandmother.

The author's final reflection is quite moving. She wrote that she feels like a mother now, "but I also feel like me". (p223). "I have now experienced the enormity of caring for babies and small children. It has been an incredible ride, a ride that we wished for and thought we were well prepared for. But it has also been very difficult. There have been tears along the way. It has tested all my resources and problem-solving skills. There has been ecstasy and delight and frustration. Our lives have drastically changed". (p.224).

Initially, my impression of the book was that the narrative was almost too good to be true from my stance as a clinician who is constantly confronted with young couples burdened with early parenting. But perhaps the author is speaking for the majority of new parents who are definitely challenged but able to manage, using their skills, support networks and professional assistance when required, finally delighting in being parents.

Certainly this book is a valuable resource for expectant or new parents because the author wrote honestly about 'the stuff' that happened to her and her emotional journey.

**Beulah Warren**

MA (Hons) MMH(Infant)

## **AAIMHI-NSW**

*proudly presents*

**Bonnie Harris**

**Director, Connective Parenting**

**Author of 'When Your Kids Push Your Buttons' and 'Confident Parents, Remarkable Kids'**

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