Nurses of Passchendaele: Caring for the Wounded of the Ypres Campaigns 1914-18

This book looks at the role of nurses in the horror and mud of the Battle of Passchendaele.

Of all of the places we recall from the first world war, Passchendaele — the site of the Third Battle of Ypres — retains a sense of particular horror. It is as though the mud, the rain and the human loss have never left us.

The book deals well with the enormous toll that the 1914-18 war took on soldiers, nurses and their families, and the role played by nurses.

Queen Alexandra’s Imperial Military Nursing Service was formed in 1902, and the Territorial Force Nursing Service a few years later. The Voluntary Aid Detachment, filled with civilian volunteers who were given training, was established in 1909.

Author Christine Hallett makes it clear that despite training and education, nothing could fully prepare the nurses and their medical colleagues who went to the front, or nursed the wounded at home, for the enormity of the damage that could be inflicted on a human body.

The book gives an excellent description of the nursing services, how they worked with each other and the journey of a casualty from the front line to hospital.

The author shows the determination of many nurses to provide care near the front lines and in areas within range of enemy shelling.

It describes well how nursing and medicine were structured and the enormous courage of nurses who put their lives at risk every day.


Reviewed by Gerry O’Dwyer, national officer and team leader, RCN employment relations department

Justice for Laughing Boy

Connor Sparrowhawk drowned in a bath following an unobserved epileptic seizure while in a specialist NHS unit. I started to read this book, written by Connor’s mother, with mixed feelings. I had followed Connor’s case as it unfolded, the subsequent investigations and reports and the inquest.

This book tells the reader about Connor as a beloved son and friend. That is the most important point of the whole book. Connor was an individual with hopes and aspirations that ended when he drowned.

His mother writes about her emotions and experience of being caught up in a process that, once started, took on a life of its own and in which Connor became almost lost.

The truly sad wider message is the sense that Connor’s death was avoidable — a ‘death by indifference’.

Please do take the time to read this book and all that is says about Connor as a person and the circumstances that led to his death.


Reviewed by Michael Brown, professor of nursing, Queen’s University Belfast

Brief Cognitive Behavior Therapy for Cancer Patients

Cognitive behaviour therapy has become established as a treatment of many psychological conditions. This book offers a scholarly guide to contemporary CBTs used to support those living with cancer.

This is largely an academic text readers with experience in psychological therapies. But nurses will find the case examples and vignettes helpful insights, perhaps guiding their conversations with patients.

The engaging concluding chapter focuses on using CBT principles to self-care in a way that builds resilience. This feels relevant to all professionals. Perhaps initially best read on loan, nurses in therapeutic roles or pursuing academic study in the field may find this a useful resource for professional development.


Reviewed by Alison Finch, lead nurse for nursing and midwifery revalidation, University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust