

Social Work and Genetics, Sylvia Schild and Rita Beck Black. New York: The Haworth Press, 1984.

The purpose of this book is to provide a guide to social work practice with clients who have genetic problems. The book specifically seeks to convey basic information about genetics, genetic services, and the social and psychological needs of genetically affected clients and their families.

The book begins with an examination of the rationale for social work in genetics. The authors define the goal of social work practice with clients with genetic concerns — regardless of the setting — as improving the quality of life of affected individuals and influencing the development of genetic services that are responsive to clients' needs. The second chapter provides an overview of the field of genetic counseling and social work's involvement in genetic issues from a historical perspective. The misuse of genetic science by the eugenics movement, the evolution of clinical human genetics, changing definitions of genetic counseling, and current controversies in the field are examined and implications for social workers and other health professionals discussed.

The next chapter presents basic genetic information and describes the procedures currently used to establish a genetic diagnosis. Information is presented with clarity and precision; tables and diagrams are used to assist the reader in acquiring knowledge of essential concepts and principles of genetics. A strong feature of this chapter is the inclusion of a detailed and practical step-by-step guide for taking family histories.

The fourth and fifth chapters, 'Social and Psychological Issues' and 'Perspectives on Clinical Practice', address the impact of the genetic diagnosis, psychological aspects of reproductive risks, the impact of amniocentesis and abortion for genetic reasons, stress arising from the genetic evaluation and counseling process, and the range of social services needed by clients with genetic problems. Principles for practice are presented; issues in assessment and helping clients make decisions in the face of uncertainty are discussed. The authors suggest using a framework for 'vigilant information processing' and a 'decisional balance sheet' for genetic counseling and decision-making. These interventions appear to be practical and readily implemented. Specific issues in intervention, such as the sharing of genetic information, value conflicts, and alternative health beliefs, are examined. Throughout, the authors emphasize the need for an integrated practice approach that offers a range of modes of service.

The last two chapters, 'Genetic Screening: Historical Development and Policy Issues', and 'Ethical and Legal Issues' examine the negative consequences of the failure to provide careful legislative review of genetic screening programs and the dilemmas raised by the complex issues of informed consent, confidentiality, and responsibilities to both current and future generations. The thorough treatment of these increasingly critical concerns is a unique and valuable feature.

The discussions presented in this book are carefully documented and based on current research; the book is well-organized and well-written throughout. A glossary and a selected review of genetic disorders are included and will be helpful for the reader with little or no scientific background. Although written for social workers, this book would also be a useful tool for other health professionals engaged in the provision of genetic services.

Kristine A. Siefert, M.S.W., M.P.H., Ph.D.

*Assistant Professor
School of Social Work
The University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, MI, U.S.A.*