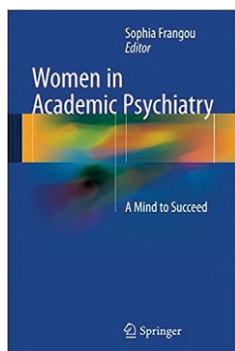


## Book Forum

### Women in Academic Psychiatry: A Mind to Succeed

edited by Sophia Frangou, M.D., Ph.D.  
New York, Springer, 2016, 161 pp., \$49.99  
(paperback).



There has never been a better time to be a woman in academic psychiatry. The American College of Neuropsychopharmacology has made a major push in recent years to increase its proportion of female members and to promote women in leadership roles. The Society of Biological Psychiatry has formed a Senior Women's Leadership Group to foster greater involvement of women in the society at all levels, and it will host a special evening workshop for senior academic female leaders at its annual meeting in May. In just the past 8 months, three vacant psychiatry department chair positions at major universities have been filled by women.

Role models now abound of creative and productive academic psychiatrists who happen to be women. We also now understand the key skills that support a successful career, meaning we can explicitly teach these skills to women entering the field. Sophia Frangou, in the approachable book she has edited, *Women in Academic Psychiatry: A Mind to Succeed*, takes on both of these important developments. She presents 16 essays by successful academic women who speak with their own voices, describing the different paths they took to prominence in their field. She then follows these personal narratives with 10 brief but well-researched chapters on how to "Plan Your Way," covering topics from "The Pursuit of Happiness" to "Be Persistent," with detours to "Project Confidence" and "Be Memorable" along the way.

The timing of Dr. Frangou's book is fortuitous because despite recent advances, it appears that much work still remains. Even after 15 years of awareness and attempts at corrective action, a recent report found that women in academic medicine are paid on average \$20,500 less than male colleagues (1). In the last several months alone, I found myself coaching two extremely productive and creative female colleagues to advocate for themselves: one midcareer woman at a prominent university who needed to negotiate for salary corrections after years of discrepancy in her compensation, and one early-career woman whose professional trajectory was getting stalled under a senior mentor who did not support her independence and advancement. An even more sobering situation occurred last year when I provided

mentoring to an ambitious and outspoken early midcareer colleague who was very shaken when a senior male colleague told her she was "abrasive." In all three of these cases, Dr. Frangou would tell us that two sets of factors were at play: what she identifies as "external barriers" (societal attitudes; the greater comfort men have with being dominating) and "internal barriers" (women's proclivity to self-doubt and guilt).

With its straightforward, focused, and supportive narrative style, this slim volume provides a remarkably clear-sighted and optimistic path forward through these barriers for all of us. A central tenet is that no one can define success for you. For each and every one of us, success is a highly personal and multi-dimensional concept, one that may very well change over the course of our lives. None of us should be confined by a restrictive generalization, whether it is someone else's definition of what a successful academic career looks like, or what it means to be a "good mother," or what kind of research questions to pursue. In keeping with this theme, the personal essays are refreshingly honest and individually unique. Dr. Antonia New writes of being considered "brash" and of her frustration when her husband is considered a "super dad" if he arranges a playdate, while she is given the message that as a working mom she is never doing enough. Dr. Mary Phillips describes dealing with self-doubt. Dr. Patricia Suppes describes the importance of maintaining confidence in her scientific vision even during dark days. These women are also funny. Dr. Judy Ford answers the question "What would you do differently if you were to start your career now?" by using only two words: day care! Many speak about mentors and role models they relied on—Myrna Weissman's name comes up more than once—and many speak about learning to trust their own ideas.

Indeed, if there is a theme throughout the book, it is the theme of how to develop self-confidence. In a recent conversation I had with Merav Ahissar, a prominent Israeli neuroscience researcher, she noted that even when there might be opportunities, women will often not put themselves forward for leadership roles. We mused together that for many women, conflict and competition (especially conflict in the workplace) are very aversive, and so women may not apply for higher leadership positions in which managing overt conflict and competing for resources are integral parts of the role, even though they are highly accomplished individuals.

Why might this be? Gavin de Becker, a specialist in corporate and private security issues and someone with a lot of experience with fear and safety, is credited with an interesting observation: "At their core," he said, "Women fear that men will kill them." He was referring to the essential sense of physical vulnerability that women experience, which is

heightened by a continuous barrage of media images and stories in which females are powerless victims, as well as directly experienced micro-aggressive behavior. I suspect that the cumulative effect, perhaps at deep and unconscious levels, may be that many women find it inherently quite aversive to engage with men in the kinds of verbal and interpersonal sparring and self-promoting behaviors that are part of leadership roles.

Can this change? Dr. Frangou would argue that it can, that it is changing already, and that it is well within our power to develop the skills that will allow us and our ideas as academic psychiatrists to thrive. It is only a matter of the four Ps: practice, persistence, and putting ourselves forward in the pursuit of happiness.

## REFERENCE

1. Freund KM, Raj A, Kaplan SE, et al: Inequities in academic compensation by gender: a follow-up to the National Faculty Survey cohort study. *Acad Med* 2016; 91:1068–1073

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## Improving Mental Health: Four Secrets in Plain Sight

by Lloyd I. Sederer, M.D. Washington, D.C., American Psychiatric Association Publishing, 2017, 129 pp., \$29.00 (hardcover).

In *Improving Mental Health: Four Secrets in Plain Sight*, Dr. Sederer addresses the costly and alarming state of affairs of mental health by describing four “secrets” that reveal a way to close the science-to-practice gap. These secrets are fundamental ways in which everyday practices can be improved to reduce the discrepancy between what we know and what we do. Dr. Sederer notes that his audiences are mental health practitioners, clinical leaders, graduate students, and patients and their families. The book succeeds in addressing such a wide scope of audience with Dr. Sederer’s clear, down-to-earth, approachable writing.

Not to be a plot spoiler, but the four secrets are:

1. Behavior serves a purpose.
2. The power of attachment.
3. Less is more.
4. Chronic stress is the enemy.

The first secret stresses an often-overlooked insight that behavior that may seem perplexing to a lay observer may actually bear a lot of meaning for a patient. Dr. Sederer encourages anyone interacting with people with mental illness to consider the adaptive function or purpose the illness may have or have

had historically. This is a welcome point because so often mental health practitioners, leaders, and patients themselves or their families tend to pathologize without putting themselves in the patient’s shoes or reflecting on the implicit meaning of the illness.

The second secret discusses the power of attachment. Dr. Sederer reviews the attachment research and literature and highlights an issue often underestimated by providers and caregivers: the patient’s need for a secure attachment. Providers may ignore how much their care, tone of voice, body language, and other mannerisms can affect a patient’s sense of safety.

The third secret is “less is more.” This secret is a true gem offering Dr. Sederer’s humanistic approach. Less is more as a rule is too often overlooked in health care, where providers and caregivers often tend to take an aggressive approach in terms of medication and hospitalizations as a first choice of care. Less reliance on medication, less neglect, less distancing from family, and less clinic- and hospital-based care are what Dr. Sederer prescribes. To Dr. Sederer, less can be replaced by a more comprehensive set of services delivered at homes and in the community with a recovery-oriented view of the future. Less medication and monitoring is more when comprehensive treatment aligns with what the patient is seeking, and less is more when prevention and early intervention are emphasized. According to Dr. Sederer, comprehensive programs will not cost more if hospital and emergency services are reduced. In time, this may also translate to reductions on the criminal justice, shelter, and welfare systems. This secret addresses more the systemic issues of mental health care and its current costly state.

The fourth secret is “chronic stress is the enemy.” Dr. Sederer reviews the effects of chronic stress on our physical and emotional health. This is probably the secret/chapter with the most resources and practical advice for the reader.

It seems that Dr. Sederer has undertaken two tasks in his book and through his public service:

1. To make mental health issues more accessible to the public through his writings in the *Huffington Post*. In the book, secrets 1 and 2 pertain to this task by offering more of a psychological-formulation insight that is often overlooked in mental health practices.
2. Secrets 3 and 4 offer more systemic insights as to how to reduce the science-to-practice gap on a system-wide level, which fit with Dr. Sederer’s role as medical director for the New York state mental health system.

While the book does not offer insights or literature that were not already known, Dr. Sederer’s neat, clear, and succinct packaging of this knowledge into a short 100-page book makes these issues very approachable and practical to lay readers and practitioners alike.

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