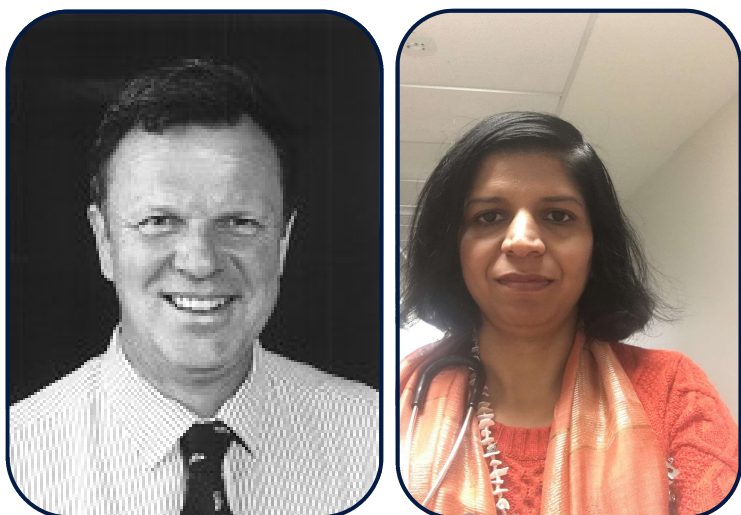


# The Knotted Cord: Transgenerational Alcohol Related Neurodevelopmental Disorder (ARND) by Kieran O'Malley. 2016, Nova Science Publishers: A Book Review

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“The Knotted cord” is a review of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) and non dysmorphic Alcohol –Related Neurodevelopmental Disorder (ARND) collectively called Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASDs). The book was written by O'Malley (2016) who is a child psychiatrist with 25 years of experience in clinical practice and research.

O'Malley (2016) stressed that FASDs were not well recognised and remain a hidden cause of disability. Both dysmorphic (FAS) and non dysmorphic ARND are caused by alcohol use in pregnancy and they lead to a huge mental health burden and cost to the community. O'Malley emphasised that there was a need for a multidisciplinary approach by medical and allied health teams for addressing the needs of this clinical cohort. In his book, O'Malley reviewed current diagnostic and management approaches, interwoven with case examples from his experience of managing patients in USA, Canada, UK and Ireland. The title of the book is a metaphor for the transplacental alcohol that impacts on a newborn; that is both caused by and causes complex dynamics within families and social/community contexts. The contributors to this predicament remain ambivalent to the significant problems. The book is an easy read with a directness of approach. It considers some of the ethical dilemmas of diagnosis, such as distressing the drinking mother, and the lack of openness to recognition and reporting, particularly within

Ireland that has the highest rates of female alcohol consumption but the lowest rates of recognition of FASDs.

In spite of progressively improved knowledge of the anatomical, diagnostic, biochemical, neurophysiological and psychological deficits which O'Malley summarised, there is dearth of literature on the management strategies for these conditions. We have to understand that this is a vulnerable group, which ends up with conduct disorders with aggressive violent outbursts, whose problems are blamed on placement and family dynamics, while completely underestimating brain and neurochemical dysfunction due to maternal prenatal alcohol exposure.

The author stressed that a transgenerational management approach was the only viable approach for managing these child and adolescent mental health patients often due to the impact of intergenerational and historical trauma, such as ‘the troubles’ in Ireland, contributing to excessive drinking habits. With the lack of clinical recognition, the onus for detecting these ‘subclinical’ cases of prenatal alcohol exposure was largely placed on schools and criminal justice systems. Additionally, the suggestion that FASDs are limited to Indigenous groups is significantly misrepresented. The common co-occurrence of complex conditions of Attachment Disorder, Trauma related disorders, ADHD, ASD, Aspergers, Mood disorders, Conduct disorders, Depression, and Self harm tendencies, are often a reflection of disabilities that track back to prenatal alcohol exposure although it is often difficult to prove this link.

O'Malley recommended a 6 dimensions approach to understanding clinical presentation. The dimensions included:

1. Motor and Sensory Disorder, including developmental coordination and sensory integration problems, (often the earliest presentation described in the Diagnostic Classification for 0-3 years, under ‘regulatory disorders of sensory processing’ with

subtypes of Hypersensitive fearful or defiant, Hypo-sensitive/under responsive, and Sensory Stimulation Seeking/impulsive) (O'Malley & Streissguth, 2006);

2. Disruptive Mood Dysregulation Disorder, with impulsive suicidal risk;
3. Language Disorder with impairment of social cognition and communication;
4. Cognitive Disorder especially executive function and working memory;
5. Facial Dysmorphology Disorder; and
6. Growth Delay Disorder.

In the book, O'Malley (2016) left no doubt about how comprehensive assessment and intervention needs to be, with multi-agency, multidisciplinary and multimodal approaches required to give these complex young people a chance to integrate problems of development and disturbance. Accordingly, his accounts provided useful guidance to clinicians faced with apparently impossible clinical predicaments. For example, PET scans were provided that illustrated the brain functional disconnects. With the dominance of genetic research, there is renewed interest in the epigenetic impacts of neurotoxic alcohol on prenatal brain development, including long term effects of alcohol craving as adults as one mechanism contributing to the transgenerational process.

The book provided a developmental framework not only for recognising the unique features of alcohol related disorders, but also expanded on the stigma and ethical dilemmas in patient management. O'Malley provided interesting clinical scenarios encompassing different ages from infancy to adulthood, throwing light on the presentations and their complex interactive mechanisms. These scenarios emphasised the need for ownership of patients by mainstream developmental neuropsychiatry and addiction medicine. The skills to care and support these children needs to be integrated into families and communities in order to strengthen the 'cord knotted' that was harmed by alcohol but not irreparably broken.

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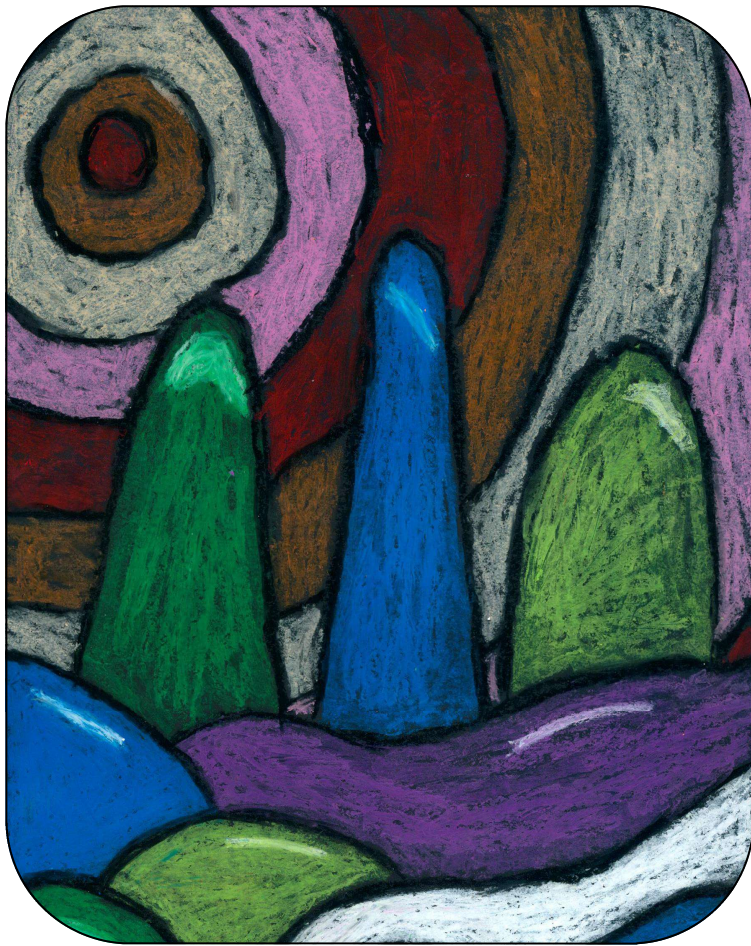
**“This book expanded on the stigma and ethical dilemmas in patient management...”**

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The book was divided into 13 chapters, including prologue, post script and epilogue, and it was well referenced including recent studies. The chapters addressed diagnosis and management approaches, and emphasised the need for diagnostic formulation, as this leads to greater clarity of management. The book also provided an addendum of practical strategies for managing children/adolescents with neurodevelopmental disorders (including FAS/ARND) that were divided into issues such as attention, transition, organisations etc. O'Malley's advice on strategies benefitted from practical personal experiences that were mixed with case examples and quotes of poems.

In the complexity of a systems-of-care approach, it is difficult to be clear as to the critical variables that should be targeted for the best outcomes. The role of paediatricians as part of multidisciplinary model is not well defined, although this may differ in different national service systems. In a nutshell this is an extremely useful book which provided an overview of diagnosis, but it also expanded our understanding and manage-



ment, particularly of the complex, lifelong and inter-generational co-morbid mental health issues of patients with FASDs.

### Further Reading

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