

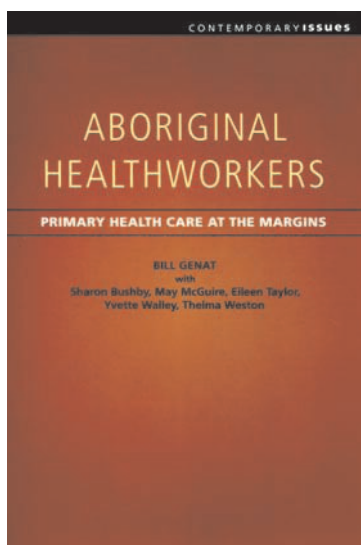
## The challenges facing Aboriginal health workers

**Aboriginal healthworkers. Primary health care at the margins.** Bill Genat with Sharon Bushby, et al. Perth: UWA Press, 2006 (xiii + 226 pp, \$39.95). ISBN 978 1920694 76 0.

**THIS BOOK IS A LITTLE GEM.** It could not be more timely and essential a read for anyone interested in how best to deliver preventive, truly holistic and primary health care to Australian Aboriginal families and communities. Bill Genat uses ethnographic methods to study the roles, challenges and lives of five urban Aboriginal health workers, each of whom have between 10 and 20 years working experience.

The book describes Aboriginal health worker practice at the grass roots, with many real-life case studies demonstrating breakdowns in family caring and the outcomes of intergenerational exclusion and oppression. It describes clearly the challenges faced (and not always overcome) by these women as they strive to help the families for whom they are responsible with all the variety of situations they face.

The section describing how Aboriginal health workers are neither valued nor appropriately used by either the health system



or the doctors, nurses and others is captured in the opening quote:

“They wanted all us health workers ’cause we were going to change everything, but we’re so strictly dictated to, it’s changed nothing. Some of us have great ideas, and we could do it all, but we just can’t do it ... we don’t get enough say in the programme.”

This book is unique, and a “must read” for anyone working in Aboriginal health, for those in charge of health systems, and for students interested in ethnographic methodology and the social sciences. It would be great if it were read by politicians too, who then might understand that an important piece of the jigsaw to “solve” poor Aboriginal health status is staring them in the face.

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