

Seductive Delusions: How Everyday People Catch STDs

Dr Jill Grimes

Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore (2008)

Paperback, 263 pages, including index

ISBN 978-0-8018-9067-3

As a sexual health nurse who works mainly in the planning and delivery of health promotion and community education, I've had many a moment contemplating new ways to try to get the safe sex message and realities of sexually transmissible infections (STIs) across to young people. I must admit, though, that writing a novel had not yet entered my thoughts. For Dr Jill Grimes however, this idea had come to her while working as a family practitioner in Texas, USA and as a faculty member at the University of Massachusetts Medical School.

Through frustrations working as a general practitioner and not being able to make an impact on the rates of STIs seen within the clinic, the author decided to use the power of storytelling to convey important messages regarding STIs; how they are transmitted, treated and partner notification.

The back cover of the book states that, 'teens, young adults, and other sexually active individuals will relate to the dramatic stories in *Seductive Delusions* while learning medically reliable information to help them make good decisions about life and love' – for the most part this claim is true.

The author also aims to destroy the common misconception among young people that STIs only occur in marginalised populations, and won't happen to them. In attempting to do this the author uses different fictional scenarios to describe the most common STIs.

Characters within this novel are diagnosed with a range of infections; Elaine the medical student has herpes simplex virus, Chad the high school football star noticed a few bumps and found out he had human papillomavirus, Tony who hooked up with his ex-girlfriend finds out he has chlamydia, and so on. Other infections which are described in the book include gonorrhoea, pubic lice, HIV, hepatitis C, syphilis, and cervical cancer is also covered.

Each infection is told from two aspects – male and female – and is wrapped up by a series of quick facts related to each infection. All in all the information is thorough and would answer all the questions young, worried students may have. The characters, however, are all heterosexual, with only same-sex sexual transmission mentioned in the facts sections of each infection. This I feel is a limitation of this novel, if the author wishes to normalise STIs, as infections that can happen to anyone it would have been appropriate to also normalise same-sex attraction and not separate this from all the other football stars and medical

students. The author, however, does state the reason for not including same-sex attraction as the inability to be truly representative and keep the book to a reasonable length.

In the preface of the book the author states that she intends the novel not be moralistic in its approach to STIs, that it is not a book that says you are bad if you have sex, however I found on occasion it to be just that. In the character Randy's depiction of being diagnosed with syphilis, the novel states that Lorie the attractive medical assistant who had previously been flirting with Randy had changed her thoughts towards Randy once he was diagnosed with syphilis; now viewing Randy as a conceited person '*who had clearly slept with one person too many*'. I shudder to think young people reading this novel may believe that we as health professionals would ever have those thoughts or place judgement on our clients.

Along with providing information about STIs, the novel also goes into great detail explaining medical insurance and how this relates to the costs of visits to doctors and medications. For young Americans this information would be great, however this may really confuse young people from other countries who may have little experience with the medical system in their home countries.

Overall, this novel provides good information in a manner that may be attractive to some young people, but not to the majority. I believe this novel would be great placed in a university library for the odd student to track down and read about the infection that concerns them.

Each character's story is easy to read, simple to understand, and told as if they were characters staring in a *Grey's Anatomy* episode, as was the author's plan. For this reason the characters' stories would possibly be memorable to the reader, as memorable as for example, what Dr McDreamy got up to in this week's *Grey's Anatomy* episode.

The author intends for each infection and each character to either be read in order or for the audience to simply read the infection which tickles their fancy. The ability for the audience to do this is I think the aspect which makes this book a realistic option for the information hungry world in which we live.

Belinda Hengel

Sexual Health Nurse

Katherine, Northern Territory