



# *METAPHOR MAP* FOR PSYCHIATRIC EXPERIENCES

## Why metaphors?

Metaphors are everywhere. And they are especially common when everyday language reaches its limits, when ordinary words are insufficient, seem unreliable and fail to capture an experience. They often come up in clinical conversations when difficult topics need to be discussed.

Metaphors compare one thing with another and thereby open up a new world of insight, intuitive knowledge and embodied experience. Metaphors have the power to convey new meanings by revitalizing our understanding of lived experiences and the world we inhabit.

Research shows that metaphors are often used to describe what it is like to suffer or to be ill. Some metaphors are more effective than others. Some are so deeply ingrained in language that we no longer recognize them as metaphors; others are strange, idiosyncratic, beautiful, bizarre. Studies show that the use of metaphors by clinicians can increase patient satisfaction because metaphors allow the creation of a common language that can enrich the relationship. Research also shows that metaphors can be empowering for patients, enabling them to gain a sense of agency when they express their illness experiences. In other words, recognizing the importance of metaphors in psychiatric contexts can expand and enrich the conversation for patients, doctors and relatives.

*Who is this map for?*

- people with lived experience in psychiatry
- clinicians, health care professionals, social workers
- relatives, friends, partners
- educators

## *What do we mean by psychiatric experiences?*

The word "psychiatry" can be a loaded term, associated with stigmatization and pathologization. This metaphor map depicts a space of varied experiences within the unique and, for some, closed world of psychiatry. Future metaphor maps may cover other spaces of experience within or outside the clinic.

## *Why a metaphor map?*

We hope that our map will support communication on difficult subjects and create mutual understanding for the place of the other. The map does not wish to suggest that our selected metaphors are better than others. By contrast, we hope that our selection will be creatively used, maybe even playfully “misused.” It may also inspire new metaphors.

## *Who is behind the metaphor map?*

This brochure is a collaboration between Anita Wohlmann, an associate professor of literature and expert in illness metaphors, Birgit Bundesen, a psychiatrist and founder of the Danish Center for Arts and Mental Health as well as Anna Rieder and Sebastian Nathan, poets with lived experience in psychiatry employed at CKMS. The metaphors were selected from interviews that Birgit Bundesen conducted as part of the research project REWRITALIZE, which develops and evaluates creative writing groups in psychiatry. The interviews were conducted with participants who have lived experience in psychiatry. This brochure was generously funded by the Discovery Grant at the University of Southern Denmark, which supports innovative ideas and the development of service-based products that are based on previous research.

## *What is the metaphor map and how can I use it?*

The map is a visualization of metaphors for psychiatric experiences. Like all maps, this map is a construction of reality with many hidden spaces: it has blanks, it borders up to other landscapes, it spills over the page, it visualizes the sky, the oceans, the lakes and the mountains as distinct yet interrelated spaces. A map has surfaces and layered depths, and this means that the lines have more dimensions than the map can ever reveal. The map, like the clinical conversation, contains many layers of the said and unsaid, the visible and invisible. It is only a snapshot of a much bigger world.

The metaphor map can be used for inspiration, to find a way, perhaps to see completely new paths in a (clinical) conversation. The map can be folded into a flyer and can be used for patient information in the clinic. It can also be hung up – for practical purposes or decoration.

Susan Sontag famously spoke of the kingdom of the sick as a country to which we all have a passport and as a place filled with metaphors. Our map can be used like a compass to navigate an unknown territory. It beckons us to explore, be surprised and curious, be inspired and discover something new at every corner.

