

The Language of Mental Health: A Glossary of Psychiatric Terms

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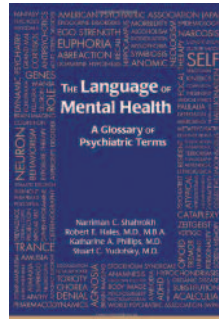
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This book is a recent publication from American Psychiatric Publishing. In the preface, the authors hope that this glossary will be 'a resource for anyone who needs concise but thorough explanations of terms that have pertinence to the practise and study of mental health'. Not only is it aiming to be used by and useful to mental health professionals but also to patients and their families, mental health advocacy organisations and attorneys amongst others. On reading this the target audience may appear broad yet all of the glossary's entries, while some aimed at one mental health group more than another, merited inclusion. So here you will find specialised terms sitting alongside more general ones. For example, sympathomimetic and sympathy. In all cases, the authors focus on a term's essential salient points to convey the meaning to as wide an audience as possible. However there is never a sense that explanations or descriptions are being dumbed down in the mass appeal. The entries are extensively cross-referenced and lead the reader on to other related terms which helps add to the user's knowledge.

As a glossary its scope is wide. It includes terms that provide insight into the historical, biological, pharmacological, psychological and medico-legal aspects of psychiatry amongst many others. What I really liked was its well stocked bank of transcultural psychiatry terms, many of which I had not heard of before (Grisi siknis, anyone?). It uses an alphabetical system to move through terms, so each subsequent entry in its description may be unrelated to what came previously, from alien hand syndrome to alienist unless they have a common root.

I approached the book as a 3rd year BST trainee in the final throes prior to the MRCPsych CASC exam. As a trainee, there are certain terms that can create confusion particularly early in training e.g. circumstantiality/tangentiality, catalepsy/cataplexy. This book deals with examples such as these well and references other relevant terms, clarifying the distinguishing characteristics. It may seem pedantic to talk about what has been left out when so much has been put it but there were some terms such as reflex hallucination/synesthesia, delusional mood and delusional perception, of which I would have welcomed a clear explanation. These terms



also have the annoying habit of appearing in exams. But omissions were the exception rather than the rule. Another bug bear of mine with this book was that on some occasions when describing a particular neurological sign, e.g. abulia, it did not contain the relevant location of the insult, whereas for other terms such as prosopagnosia, it did. Consistency here would be desirable.

Descriptions of major mental disorders are explained succinctly and focus on the core features of the illness.

While the DSM-IV is referenced, the explanations do not become overly engrossed in the complete diagnostic criteria. Again this reflects the author's wish to allow readers to 'grasp the meanings more easily' and it works. Following the glossary, there is a section listing abbreviations used in psychiatry. Next, a section on medications used in Psychiatry which classifies medication on the basis of its therapeutic effect. The pharmacology of each medication has already been described in the glossary itself which nicely compiles relevant tests under different psychiatric diagnoses headings for your consideration following the assessment of a patient. Next there is a section on legal terms which would be useful in the preparation of court reports or in giving evidence. Finally there is a section listing support organisations and websites, all of which are based in the United States and perhaps not as relevant to clinicians or service users in Ireland.

In summary, this book would be a welcome addition to any library or your own bookshelf. It comprehensively deals with a wide variety of psychiatric terms and explains them clearly and simply. Apart from its use as a reference text, it is a useful book to dip into and discover different psychiatric terms that you may need to brush up on. I would certainly recommend this book to others working in mental health especially trainees new to the grade.

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This is a potpourri of a book which would have benefitted from a modicum of structural control and the shedding of some of the oft-repeated general historical background. Nonetheless it contains a quantum of information not available elsewhere and for that alone, coupled with the author's diligence in mining sources, it has been a worthwhile exercise. Finally, unlike many publications of its type, it provides an index and short glossary of technical terms.

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