

Concise Guide to Clinical Psychiatry. By STEVEN L. DUBOVSKY. Washington: American Psychiatric Press (distributed in the UK by CUP). 1989. 198 pp. £9.95.

This slim (6" × 4") volume would easily slip into the side pocket of a suit or the rear pocket of designer jeans. This is not its only merit, and I was pleasantly surprised to have learned much from the author's commonsense clinical approach. It is one of the American Psychiatric Association's *Concise Guide* publications, and is intended for medical students and young psychiatrists in training, working mainly in the general hospital or outpatient setting. I think it would be a useful introduction for general practitioners in this country, since it is replete with commonsense and clinically useful ideas. The format relies heavily on DSM-III classifications; depression, anxiety, organic mental disorders, substance abuse, and psychoses are covered. Some of the chapters are rudimentary, but I found the sections on sleep disorders and somatoform (hypochondriacal) disorders particularly informative. The book is pervaded by a sense of optimism and certainty which those of a philosophical or cynical disposition might find simplistic or even offensive. Nevertheless, its author's sound clinical acumen and confident approach makes a welcome change from the sometimes hypertheoretical and critical approach of many books written on this side of the Atlantic.

I enjoyed this book very much and would recommend it highly to medical students and general practitioners in this country. I look forward to reading other books in this series.

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Somatic Therapies in Psychiatry. By LAURENCE B. GUTTMACHER. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1989. 164 pp. £9.95.

This little book will be a godsend to psychopharmacotherapists, but may be less enthusiastically received by psychiatric nosologists. There are sections on antipsychotics, antidepressants, agents for bipolar disorders, drugs for anxiety and insomnia, and geriatric psychopharmacology. There is a review of ECT, and the controversial issue of informed consent is firmly addressed. Two model consent forms – one long and the other brief – are appended. The waxings and wanings of the popularity of ECT are charted, and the film *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* merits a dishonourable mention. Drugs are dealt with comprehensively, but some recent somatic treatments are neglected, like the bright light therapy for the melancholy experienced in the dark winter months or the latitudes of the high Arctic.

The risks of combining ECT, lithium and antipsychotic drugs are discussed, as are the considerations involved in choosing between lithium and carbamazepine in the treatment of mania. The author rightly condemns the uncritical prescription of benzodiazepines without considering non-drug alternatives. The book is so up-to-date that the piece on buspirone had appeared before the drug trial evidence of its efficacy.

Up to this point I mostly applaud the sentiments expressed, but, I suspect in company with many European psychiatrists, I was unhappy with the view that there was little merit in distinguishing between endogenous and non-endogenous depression, a rejection of the wisdom of the past in line with other recent pragmatic US views on classification, e.g. DSM-III, which derives more from committee consensus than from clinical evidence.

However, to dwell on these discordances is to be ungenerous. The book is strong on the drug treatment of schizophrenia and affective illness, and the section on lithium is admirable. There are also two warnings to be heeded by practising clinicians: the risk of Ebstein's malformation in pregnant women given lithium during the first trimester of pregnancy; and the hazards of anticholinergic toxicity linked with prescribing antidepressants to the elderly.

The book will help many practising clinical psychiatrists. The price will suit most pockets.

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Frontiers in Neuroendocrinology. Volumes 9 and 10. Edited by CUCIANO MARTINI and WILLIAM F. GANANG. New York: Raven Press. 1986, 1988. 282 pp, 343 pp.

These are part of a well-respected series of reviews of recent advances in basic neuroendocrinology. They are very basic, and I struggled for a long while to find some clinical lesson from a chapter on the neuroendocrine system of the fruit fly. Volume 10 has more to offer, and includes an encyclopaedic review of the distribution of 38 neuropeptides in almost as many brain regions. The expression and regulation of genes for hormones is an area of importance and a mechanism for slowly acting negative feedback mechanisms; several chapters discuss this, in connection for example with the new hormone atrial natriuretic factor, and also POMC.

The series should be in every university library, but will not be read by many psychiatrists.

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