

Concise Guide to Women's Mental Health

By Vivien K. Burt and Victoria C. Hendrick.
Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press.
1997. 168 pp. £21.00 (pb).
ISBN 0-88048-343-1

This is a pocket guide to women's mental health problems, providing practical and easily accessible information for psychiatrists and trainees. Dr Burt, founder of the UCLA Women's Life Centre, and her colleague Dr Hendrick approach their subject matter with enthusiasm and expertise. They offer us a whirlwind tour of the major reproductive life events and their associated psychopathology. Menstruation, contraception, pregnancy, childbirth, abortion, infertility, the menopause and gynaecological cancers are considered in turn. There is also a broader consideration of gender issues in the treatment of the major psychiatric disorders. At each stage the message is clear: the assessment and management of psychological difficulties should be considered in the wider context of a woman's biological state and her point in the reproductive life cycle.

Much is familiar in the chapters on pregnancy, postpartum disorders and the menopause. These chapters are factual and comprehensive. More interesting, to my mind, was the discussion of an iatrogenic condition: the psychological implications of infertility treatment. There is a sensitive and thoughtful account of the difficulties encountered by infertile couples undergoing treatment. This seems to be informed by insights gained from the authors' clinical experience with many such couples rather than merely a superficial review of scientific fact. This is also the only place in the book where relationships with men are mentioned in any depth. Elsewhere, there is the curious impression that women's psychological problems arise in a strictly biological, male-free zone.

Overall, there is much to admire. There is an abundance of useful tables. References are numerous, relevant and up to date. There is an integration of information from psychiatry, medicine, oncology, obstetrics and gynaecology. As such, this book should be of interest to psychologically aware trainees in several disciplines, not just psychiatry. One problem which, I suspect, will result in fewer sales than this book deserves is that the book is expensive for its size. The solution, perhaps, is to

consult a copy in a well-stocked medical library.

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Seminars in the Psychiatry of Learning Disabilities

Edited by Oliver Russell. London: Gaskell.
1997. 282 pp. £15.00 (pb). ISBN 1-901242-02-1

This book is one of the College Seminars series, aimed at trainee psychiatrists. It starts by describing those skills and knowledge which the College expects trainees to acquire in this field. This 'sets the scene' for a book which is written very clearly, with complex issues being explained in simple language, with helpful use of boxes by the contributors to highlight and summarise key points. References and suggested further reading are given at the end of the chapters, the latter being brief enough to be followed-up by interested readers.

Psychiatric disorders across the life-span are discussed with reference to their differing presentations in people with different levels of learning disabilities. Trainees new to the subject are often anxious about how to approach the assessment of someone with learning disabilities. They are unsure as to how relevant their present knowledge and skills are to their new situation. Several chapters are helpful in this context, but perhaps two chapters should be highlighted: that on 'Psychiatric disorders and severe disabilities', where the issue of diagnosing mental illness in this population is debated, and that on 'Communicating with people with learning disabilities'. This latter is a fascinating account of the development of communication, its assessment and the use of communication techniques. It provides lots of useful pointers, from the sophisticated to the more down-to-earth, such as "Do not cramp your style by too much formality, be an opportunist – sing, act, whistle, change your voice, gear and speech". This chapter is quite technical in parts but the use of such practical advice lightens the mood and enables the reader to persist. Reference is frequently made to the importance of looking at the social context in which the disorder occurs, and this is emphasised too in the chapters on the diagnosis of psychi-

atric disorders and on the various therapeutic interventions available. Of these latter, I found the chapters on the use of psychotropic drugs and on behavioural interventions particularly thought-provoking and stimulating.

The book provides a useful historical overview and chapters on classification and epidemiology which give a framework in which to view psychiatric disorders. Associated areas are discussed too: philosophical and ethical issues, epilepsy and forensic issues. All are important to the psychiatrist in training. The role and responsibilities of the psychiatrist in learning disabilities have changed over recent years. De-institutionalisation has progressed rapidly. The pattern of provision, including that of psychiatric services, in the community takes different forms in different parts of the UK. This can be confusing to trainees (and others) in psychiatry. It is vital that a clear overview of the topic is given. This book achieves this. It is also cheap. I will certainly recommend it to trainees.

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Understanding Post-Traumatic Stress: A Psychosocial Perspective on PTSD and Treatment

By Stephen Joseph, Ruth Williams & William
Yule. Chichester: John Wiley. 1997. 187 pp.
£15.99 (pb)

In recent years there has been increasing research concerning post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This has been accompanied by a welcome increase in the number of books available that attempt to integrate and disseminate the research findings. The three psychologists who wrote this book are well known in the field, particularly for their work following the *Herald of Free Enterprise* disaster. The book is aimed at a wide readership and provides a good summary of a psychosocial perspective. The layout is simple and effective, with the well-defined aims of each chapter being covered and often illustrated with case studies before being complemented by a useful list of summary points. The flow of the book is good and balanced without problematic repetition.

On the surface this book appears to be a basic textbook but the authors also use it to discuss their "integrative model of adjustment" in more detail. Not surprisingly, this model incorporates a variety of factors including stimulus, personality and appraisal factors and is supported by fair discussion of research findings.

This book concerns itself solely with a psychosocial perspective, which no doubt accounts for the absence of comment on the psychobiology of PTSD and lack of consideration of pharmacological treatment approaches. Readers hoping for more detailed consideration of psychodynamic approaches will also be disappointed. These omissions prevent the book from being a comprehensive introductory text on PTSD but Joseph, Williams and Yule have produced a very good book which is shorter and considerably cheaper than many of the others currently available.

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The Aftermath of Road Accidents: Psychological, Social and Legal Consequences of an Everyday Trauma

Edited by Margaret Mitchell. London: Routledge. 1997. 261 pp. £45.00 (hb), £15.99 (pb). ISBN 0-415-13053-0

Medico-legal work has been one of the silent growth areas of clinical psychiatry. Much of this growth has involved the assessment of victims of accidents, particularly road traffic accidents, as the law has belatedly come to recognise that psychiatric disorders are a frequent cause of prolonged distress among accident victims. Given the prevalence of road accidents and also the fact that approximately a third of all people seriously injured embark on a compensation claim, surprisingly little is known about the course of psychological sequelae and the indications for psychiatric intervention.

This book, edited by a Reader in Psychology at Glasgow Caledonian University, is therefore a timely publication which includes contributions from several experts who have been involved in clarifying some of the issues in this area of medico-legal practice. The book is divided into three parts which deal with psycho-

logical and psychiatric consequences, legal consequences and social consequences of accidents; the latter part also includes contributions on the role of psychological treatment.

Of particular interest to psychiatrists are the chapters on post-concussion syndrome by Youngjohn, the spectrum of psychiatric disorders by Mayou and the legal issues involved in establishing a claim for damages by Wheat & Napier. It is now recognised that a large number of psychiatric disorders can follow accidents, even when there has been no significant brain injury. An acute stress disorder, depression, travel anxiety and alcohol misuse are all recognised as potential consequences of accidents but the condition which has attracted most attention is post-traumatic stress disorder, which can also involve 'secondary' victims, namely those who witness an accident involving a close relative or friends.

It is clear that much more needs to be understood about why certain individuals develop psychiatric problems whereas other individuals make a rapid recovery and resume their normal daily activities. Vulnerability factors need to be identified and the course of the various syndromes needs to be established by more long-term, prospective studies. The role of psychological intervention needs to be clarified, particularly in the light of two negative studies which have found no benefit for psychological debriefing during the immediate aftermath of accidents. Another cherished belief which has been undermined by recent research is the status of compensation neurosis. For the great majority of accident victims there is no substantial evidence that the prospect of litigation is a major determinant of psychiatric symptoms and only a small minority deliberately simulate or exaggerate the extent of their disabilities. Nevertheless, the impression remains that victims frequently perceive the legal process as frustrating and unduly protracted, often adding to the distress that is directly related to the trauma.

This book is a well edited, authoritative and contemporary source of information which should provide a useful reference for any psychiatrist or psychologist involved in the assessment or treatment of road traffic accident victims.

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The Neurobiology of Cocaine Addiction. From Bench to Bedside.

Edited by H. Joseph and B. Stimmell. New York: Haworth Press. 1997. 129 pp. \$24.00 (US) (pb). ISBN 0-7890-0031-8

This book has been very helpful to me coming at a time when cocaine use has become more prevalent on the UK scene. First published as volume 15 of the *Journal of Addictive Diseases* in 1996, it has the status of a series of peer-reviewed research articles compiled into a book, with an editorial and a selective guide to current reference sources.

The editorial aim is to bring these together to make researchers and clinicians aware of current research on biological, environmental and social factors associated with cocaine use. The expectation is that this knowledge will help to shape the clinical response to patients who present with problems due to cocaine.

The research was conducted by workers from New York and has a parochial flavour in the sense of using as its subjects patients who are in methadone maintenance programmes there. Thus, the extent to which all the results might pertain elsewhere is not clear as there might be selection bias. Also, the use of high-technology apparatus such as quantitative electroencephalography for predicting treatment response is an interesting theoretical exercise, but few services have access to that type of sophisticated investigation. However, a tantalising glimpse is given of the way cocaine might sensitise dopaminergic cells with persisting effects in some individuals, and of the possibility that patients' responses to antidepressants could be predicted.

There are many other good points in this volume, particularly in the section on cocaine, dopamine and the endogenous opioid system. The neural networks through which substances work are of great theoretical and clinical importance and this chapter gives evidence that effective methadone maintenance for patients with opiate dependence might well be protective against cocaine use through action on the mu receptor.

I am unaware of a book that brings together the current state of knowledge in this way and am happy to recommend it to libraries and to all who work in substance services for a short, easy and informative read with many references.

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