

Book reviews

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Medically Unexplained Illness: Gender and Biopsychosocial Implications. By S. K. Johnson. (Pp. 280; \$69.95; ISBN 0-9792125-8-8 hb.) American Psychological Association Books. 2007.

Medically unexplained illnesses are frequently encountered in primary care and specialty practice, as well as in psychiatric and behavioral health settings. These psychosomatic conditions are often viewed as 'fashionable' and carry the label of somatizing disorders (Ford, 1997). Patients with these conditions tend to 'doctor shop' and frequently pass from one clinician to the next (Taylor *et al.* 2000). Susan K. Johnson in her book, *Medically Unexplained Illness* has surveyed the recent literature on how psychological, social and physiological factors contribute to the clinical presentation and clinical course of selected 'unexplained' syndromes. Specifically, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), fibromyalgia (FM), and chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) are addressed with detailed descriptions of symptoms, diagnosis and bio-psychosocial treatment. Additionally, the more recent syndrome, multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS), is extensively reviewed and discussed with respect to treatment options and possible co-morbidities.

These four medical conditions usually occur in women, and are frequently associated with anxiety and depressive disorders. Medically unexplained illnesses are also associated with significant utilization of health-care resources. They may account for as much as 15% of a primary-care physician's practice time (Smith *et al.* 1986).

The author, Dr Johnson, focuses much of her attention on unanswered questions pertaining to the four syndromes in order to explain how gender and bio-psycho-social factors contribute to the development of these 'unexplained' illnesses. *Medically Unexplained Illness* contains a fascinating discussion of etiological factors for IBS, FM, CFS, and MCS. Each of the four syndromes are discussed in the context of childhood and family development, interpersonal and psychosocial stressors, cultural and cognitive factors. These factors may serve to predispose a vulnerable individual to the development of a psychosomatic disorder, or psychosocial or physiological factors may serve to precipitate and/or perpetuate the condition. Moreover, the neurobiological underpinnings of these

illnesses are briefly considered with regard to the current literature and recently promulgated hypotheses. The chapters that address CFS are especially noteworthy. The chapters devoted to FM are less impressive. However, the psychosocial and gender implications of each of the four illnesses are well conceived and effectively discussed. The treatment of each syndrome is well outlined, including the need to consider history of trauma and abuse, and any interpersonal or 'cognitive' issues.

What clearly falls short in this book is the explanation of the biology for each of the 'unexplained disorders' which may certainly be an indication as to why these illnesses are indeed 'unexplained'. In most cases, pharmacotherapy, antidepressants or anxiolytics, are recommended in combination with psychotherapeutic, psychosocial or alternative treatment modalities. Co-morbid psychiatric disturbance is readily acknowledged in this text, but generally not addressed in any detail for the purposes of diagnosis or treatment. Obviously, the author recognizes that both must be treated in order to achieve an optimal outcome.

The author presents a superb synthesis of the treatment interventions that have been shown to be the most effective for each of the four conditions. The bio-psycho-social model 'helps to illuminate a contextual perspective to account for the interaction of biological, psychological, and social, and cultural factors'. The author effectively informs the reader of the importance of all of these factors in the development of disease perception, symptom generation, and health-care seeking (Mayer, 1999).

Medically Unexplained Illness is certainly well written and superbly organized. As explicitly stated, the book is intended for health and clinical psychologists, gender researchers, and medical sociologists. The text would be useful to all clinicians who encounter patients with psychosomatic disorders or for those who work in settings where somatization is frequently encountered. Patients and family members of individuals diagnosed with IBS, FM, CFS, or MCS or other medically unexplained illnesses could also benefit from reading this text.

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Sleep and Psychosomatic Medicine. Edited by S. R. Pandi-Perumal, R. R. Ruoti and M. Kramer. (Pp. 296; £115.00; ISBN 9780415394994.) Taylor & Francis (Informa Healthcare), Basingstoke, UK. 2007.

This book on Sleep and Psychosomatic medicine is written by a group of experienced authors who are mainly from the USA. There are a few other contributors particularly from South America and the Far East but none from Europe. The title of the book might suggest that this was mainly concerned with the psychological aspects of sleep medicine but the authors take a wider view. They cover the effects of sleep disorders and sleep deprivation on a broad range of general medical conditions and in most chapters the effects that these disorders have on sleep itself are also examined. The interaction of organic disease with psychological problems is a theme in many of the chapters.

Important topics that are covered include, for instance, the cardiovascular risk factors and metabolic and endocrine consequences of obstructive sleep apnoeas. Current issues such as the relationship between stress and sleep and the role of sleep deprivation as an antidepressant and the sleep-related aspects of fibromyalgia are well covered. There are, however, some surprising omissions and areas of

under-emphasis. There is very little information on the effects of sleep on respiration in nocturnal hypercapnia. Respiratory failure in neuromuscular and skeletal disorders is not touched on and there is only a short section on asthma and sleep. The important topics of nocturnal cardiac ischaemia and angina and the relationship of cardiac dysrhythmias to non-REM and REM sleep are hardly mentioned.

The content of the chapters varies rather more than would be anticipated. Some are more suitable for the generalist who wishes to have an overview of the subject but others are more incisive in the way they deal with the detail of the topics and aspects which are of current interest. These include the chapters dealing with headaches, dreams and drugs in sleep. Most of the chapters suffer from not having many recent references. This suggests that this multi-author book has taken some time to be completed and it would have been preferable for the chapters to have been updated prior to publication.

The chapters are clearly laid out and the information is easily accessible. The style of most of the chapters is clear and the tables, figures and scans are all well chosen. There are sufficient references in the text to direct the general reader to the original sources.

This book should be of interest to all those who deal with patients with sleep disorders and to internal physicians who wish to have a wider view of the medical conditions that they treat. There is much in this book which is absent from the usual textbooks of internal medicine and which most physicians would find of benefit both in their clinical practice and in directing their research. The book should be of particular value to psychologists, psychiatrists and those dealing with the effects of sleep on daytime performance as well as internal physicians. I would recommend it for the breadth of topics that it covers and its holistic approach. It is a welcome addition to the expanding range of books now available which cover the rapidly developing field of sleep medicine.

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