

can be viewed in the light of modern knowledge. There is a brief historical survey of some eccentrics of the past four centuries. The book will be of great interest to all psychiatrists and psychologists. Whatever the criticisms of a self-selected group may be, this immensely readable book describes a study that breaks new ground, where others should certainly follow. It will be a hard task to write with comparable grace and learning.

GAJUS DAVIES, *Consultant Psychiatrist, King's College Hospital, London*

Positive Psychotherapy: Therapy and Practice of a New Method. By NOSSRAT PESECHKIAN. Berlin: Springer Verlag. 1987. 442 pp. £17.50.

This book has the aim of amalgamating different strands of psychotherapeutic thought from the East and the West. The author presents his therapeutic framework as a practical guide rather than a new theory, with the emphasis on short-term focused work, and hopes that it will be useful to a wide audience. These are aims which most of us would like to achieve, and I began reading with some interest.

However, it seems to me that it falls between two stools. On the one hand, the introduction by the author of his own system of nomenclature means it is difficult to grasp the framework of treatment described. On the other hand, the inclusion of Oriental folk tales and the very simple clinical cases described make it seem at times like pop psychology from another era.

Although interesting, this is not a book I would recommend for a library and, at the price, not one that would be sufficiently useful for individual professionals to buy for their personal use.

RACHEL LEHEUP, *Consultant Child Psychiatrist, Child and Family Therapy Service, Nottingham*

Use of Anticonvulsants in Psychiatry: Recent Advances. Edited by SUSAN L. MCELROY and HARRISON G. POPE. New Jersey: Oxford Health Care Inc. 1988. 188 pp. \$22.50.

This is an American multi-authored text. The opening chapters focus on individual anti-convulsant agents, while other chapters deal more specifically with anticonvulsants in the treatment of various psychiatric disorders. The information is presented in an authoritative fashion by active researchers in the field.

The section on phenytoin makes the point that early open studies of this drug in the treatment of psychiatric patients gave encouraging results, but that these have not been replicated by more stringent research. That well-known phenomenon of early enthusiasm being

dampened by data needs to be borne in mind when reading this text. Although the evidence for the use of carbamazepine in bipolar disorder is convincing, much of the evidence for other drugs and other indications comes from open studies, single case studies or personal experience, or isolated double-blind studies. Discussions of the possible mode of action of anticonvulsants in some of the secondary indications are therefore particularly speculative.

The research-minded psychiatrist will find that this text stimulates many ideas for potential projects based on the preliminary data and speculations put forward by the authors. The book also contains practical advice on the use of anti-convulsants in psychiatric syndromes, although access to this is handicapped by the lack of an index.

Few would buy this book for their personal library, but it would be a useful, although not essential, addition to the library of departments which have a research interest in psychopharmacology.

MALCOLM PEET, *Senior Lecturer, Department of Psychiatry, University of Sheffield*

Society, Stress and Disease, Vol. 5: Old Age. Edited by LENNART LEVI. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1988. 383 pages. £75.00.

This is the final volume in a series based on international symposia sponsored by the WHO and the University of Uppsala. Previous volumes dealt with the psychosocial environment and psychosomatic diseases, childhood and adolescence, the productive and reproductive age, male/female roles and relationships, and working life. The blurb states that the contributors "examine research into the mental and physical effects of old age, and the medical and social measures that are being taken to ameliorate them. The topics covered include the mental and physical effects of retirement, of work, of illness at home and in hospital, and studies of different communities in America, rural France, Africa, the Soviet Union and elsewhere, to discover the ways in which various social and family structures in different countries affect the well-being of the elderly".

Selye contributes chapters on 'Stress and ageing' and 'Stress without distress'. Sainsbury's chapter has particular regard to suicide. Birren, Butler and Eisdorfer are among well-known psychogeriatric 'names'. The topics range widely – from a behavioural approach, to theories of ageing, to "pet facilitated therapy, or PFT". There is far more about retirement than bereavement, even though the effects of the former on morbidity and mortality are far less important than the latter.

Alvar Svanborg's taster of his survey of septuagenarians in Gothenburg, distinguishing between functional and chronological ageing and noting that the main