

can't be fitted into their schedules – is a deeper matter than a simple issue of 'subject compliance'.

Provided you are interested in the 'how' of relaxation more than the 'why', this impressive, dense, yet commendably readable book is an essential acquisition. It will be a godsend to researchers, and a stimulating and challenging sourcebook for clinicians, especially those who think that dispensing an audio cassette is the top and bottom of relaxation training. But, as a frustrated client once remarked about a pre-recorded tape: "The instructions were super, it was the voice that kept putting me off".

JULIAN FULLER, *Principal Clinical Psychologist, Butler Clinic, Langdon Hospital, Dawlish, Devon*

**Modern Perspectives in Psychiatry, No. 10. Modern Perspectives in Clinical Psychiatry.** Edited by JOHN G. HOWELLS. New York: Brunner/Mazel. 1988. 392 pp. \$40.00.

This book consists of 17 articles each on a different topic and by a different author. The editor states that the volume is not intended as a textbook, that a complete coverage of clinical psychiatry is not attempted, and that the topics covered "select themselves". Certainly there seems to be no particular plan behind the choice of topics. Some are fashionable, e.g. 'AIDS and psychiatry' or 'From mental hospital to alternative community services'; others are standard topics which would be dealt with in most publications on clinical psychiatry, e.g. 'Epidemiology in psychiatry'; and 'Liaison psychiatry'; and yet others are more unusual, e.g. 'Systems theory in psychiatry'. There is diversity too in the approaches taken by the authors. Some chapters provide well-organised and balanced, if fairly simple, accounts of the relevant topics, and others are at a more advanced level. Several are clearly written by enthusiasts whose intention has been to make a case for the subject of their choice rather than to present an even-handed account.

Most of the authors are from North America, and their reviews of the literature tend to have a transatlantic slant. Similarly, some of the accounts concern aspects of psychiatric practice in the United States which differ from the circumstances of practice of most psychiatrists in this country. For these reasons this book will not be particularly helpful for trainees preparing for the MRCPsych, but it is probably not for such an audience that it is intended. It is perhaps because I read this book over the holiday period that it reminded me of an old-fashioned Christmas anthology. It is a series of essays, some very careful, some a little trivial, others very informative and a few that are just different – for example, one which presented changing styles of psychiatric practice in relation to political, fiscal, and social changes in the United States.

I enjoyed this book and I would recommend it as a worthwhile purchase for any psychiatrist who is not thinking in terms of examinations but is looking for an informative and sometimes thought-provoking account of diverse issues related to current psychiatric practice.

EVE C. JOHNSTONE, *Member of the Scientific Staff of the Medical Research Council and Honorary Consultant Psychiatrist, Northwick Park Hospital and Clinical Research Centre, Harrow*

**Handbook of Psychopharmacology Vol. 20. Psychopharmacology of the Ageing Nervous System.** Edited by L. L. IVERSON, S. D. IVERSON and S. H. SNYDER. New York: Blenheim. 1988. 482 pp. \$75.00.

Those familiar with this excellent series on psychopharmacology will greet volume 20 with mouth-watering anticipation. They should not, however, be misled by the title; the book is almost entirely about the psychopharmacology of Alzheimer's disease. It is none the worse for that, but readers interested in the nervous system of the normal elderly, those with functional psychoses, and those with multi-infarct dementia will find little of interest.

Furthermore, this book is intended as a sourcebook for those engaged in psychopharmacological research. It has excellent and authoritative reviews covering the subject in great detail, the first chapter for example containing nearly 400 references. Most psychiatrists will find that it contains more information than they can easily digest, and might prefer the review in the *British Medical Bulletin* on Alzheimer's disease, also edited by Iverson (and Ross), published in 1986.

Each of the 11 chapters is written by a different author, resulting in a certain amount of repetition, but with the advantage that each chapter can be read on its own. My last criticism is inevitable for a volume of this kind, in that it is already out of date. Thus there is only one mention of THA, the chapter on genetics makes no mention of molecular genetics, and there are only a tiny number of references after 1986.

The first chapter, by Mann, provides a masterly summary of the histological and biochemical features of Alzheimer's disease, including an interesting speculation about the sequence of events, suggesting that it may start with loss of the blood-brain barrier, followed by senile plaque formation, cell death from tangle formation, and retrograde degeneration to nucleus of Meynert. Hohmann *et al* focus on the cholinergic system in Alzheimer's disease, initially throwing doubt on the whole theory by quoting a study which showed that acetylcholinesterase was not a specific marker of cholinergic synapses; they conclude, however, that the cholinergic theory has most promise for therapy. Rossor writes a much briefer review of the biochemistry of many dementias, the section on Alzheimer's disease