

them all. Importantly and most usefully the answer sections, following each topic, are explanatory so the book is also a good teaching exercise. Furthermore, the answers are referenced to major texts if more detail is required. This latter point is not as useful as it at first seems as the texts tend to be American and not standard British texts.

Overall the book is well thought out and useful for the following reasons: firstly, the question stems are on the whole unambiguous so the candidate will know what the question is asking for; secondly, the range of questions are comprehensive and will therefore include most of the areas that are likely to occur in the MRCPsych; and thirdly, it will allow practice in areas that candidates often feel insecure, such as neuroscience, and so can provide a good testing ground and instil confidence.

In conclusion, this is a useful exam book to supplement the usual revision texts, especially for those who feel that they need to work further on the neurology aspects of the exam.

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**Handbook of Affective Disorders (2nd edn).** Edited by EUGENE S. PAYKEL. Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone. 1992. 712 pp. £80.00.

The demise of the comprehensive textbook or reference work has long been predicted, because of the speed of scientific advance, and it has been suggested that loose-leaf folders, for instance, are a more functional alternative. Yet many of the well-known major hardbacks remain firmly extant and it is strongly rumoured that even those doctors who subscribe to regularly updated part-works do not actually bother to put them in the folders. A new edition of Professor Paykel's handbook, ten years after the original one, confirms that reports of the death of this medium are much exaggerated, although it now has a competitor in Goodwin & Jamison's work on manic-depressive disorder.

The 42 chapters come mostly from an Anglo-American-Australian axis, with a few European outliers; there are many distinguished and expected names among the contributors. The 'handbook' title, however, perhaps fails to convey that this work has more a scientific and theoretical than clinical approach to the subject. This emphasis can be seen particularly in the coverage of antidepressant drugs—less than 30 pages out of 712 deal directly with the question,

although there is also a chapter on anticonvulsant and innovative compounds, as well as others on maintenance treatment, prediction of response, and resistance. Similarly, a substantial chapter on neurochemistry gives little space to the mechanism of action of antidepressants and only two sections deal with clinical assessment.

In some cases, substantial research effort seems to have had fairly modest results up to now: Hirschfeld & Shea can come to few conclusions on the role of personality—other than a non-specific effect on vulnerability—and although there is neuroimaging evidence of fronto-subcortical changes in cerebral blood flow, their meaning is not clear. Fink concludes that the changes produced by electroconvulsive therapy which are necessary for a therapeutic effect cannot be distinguished from those changes which are secondary. Checkley's conclusions on neuroendocrinology suggest a still fairly rudimentary understanding of this aspect of depression, although an accompanying chapter by Holsboer on the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenocortical system sees this as the "most promising source for urgently required laboratory markers". Kupfer & Reynolds say that the social Zeitgebers hypotheses "may well provide the conceptual machinery for integrating biological and psychological concepts of aetiology", but do not explain what that hypothesis is. Gordon Parker finds strong evidence for the central role of inadequate parental care as a key developmental risk factor, but calls for "close consideration" of the social models proposed by BlairBrown & Harris.

A long historical account by Mendelson of the psychoanalytical approach concludes that it "has met its greatest challenge in the sphere of the affective illnesses". That is a polite way of saying it does not work. In much the same vein, Clarkin *et al* find studies of marital and family therapy "difficult to interpret". Klerman & Weissman, however, advocate a much more focused psychotherapeutic approach, "exploring behaviour in the current disorder in terms of interpersonal relationships". Many other specific aspects such as old age, bereavement, suicide and seasonal disorders are well discussed.

Every attempted comprehensive work is inevitably something of a curate's egg, and there are some aspects of affective disorders for which Goodwin & Jamison will prove to be a better source. However, this has become an essential reference work in psychiatry, and its updated edition will be widely welcomed.

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