

would like to know how to intervene in their own work context.

The authors describe their own school-based study into adolescent self-harm and suicidal ideas in 6000 15- to 16-year-olds. The methodological description might be a little more detailed than some readers would require but this is not a major problem and those less research-minded will easily skip forward to chapters they find more relevant. Research findings cover the nature, prevalence and impact of deliberate self-harm; how these adolescents differ from others; and adolescents' help-seeking and coping strategies. There was much that I, as an National Health Service (NHS) child and adolescent psychiatrist, found fascinating and relevant. I was, for instance, very interested and somewhat concerned to read that only 12.6% of those who had engaged in self harm in the previous year reported that they had presented to a general hospital after this act. This puts a different perspective on the emphasis my own department has been placing on ensuring that all those who present to the Accident & Emergency (A&E) department following an act of deliberate self harm, get an adequate assessment. What about the other 87.4%, those who do not present to A&E?

The second section moves beyond the authors' own research and covers the crucial clinical issues of prevention and treatment. Chapters in this section are helpfully organized by sector. The first chapter focuses on education and on primary, secondary and tertiary prevention in this context. The point is well made that rather than focusing on suicidal behaviour alone, which some believe may actually increase self-harm behaviour, preventative programmes might more usefully raise awareness of mental health issues in general. Further fruitful areas might be to enhance adolescents' coping skills and also the abilities of peers to be of help. The next chapter covers assessment and intervention by the health service particularly the general practitioner and the general hospital emergency services. A useful framework is provided for assessment and risk management. The third chapter in this section looks at other sources of support including the role of self-help books and telephone helplines. We are reminded of the importance attached by adolescents to confidentiality. My own clinical work is with young

people with eating disorders so the next chapter describing the negative effects of media portrayal and of websites which encourage suicidal behaviour was uncomfortably familiar though nonetheless disconcerting.

The book concludes with a number of helpful appendices. These include a list of useful contact numbers and websites which adolescents themselves, or their friends and relatives might access. Also guidelines and information sheets to assist school staff, plus a section on further reading.

I found this to be a most helpful and well-written book. It contains a wealth of information that will be useful to everyone who has an interest in self-harming adolescents. If there is something missing then for me it is the lack of emphasis on the importance of the family. It is all too easy to see the family as inadequate and as the seat of pathology, and adolescents themselves tend to emphasize the importance of peer rather than family relationships. Nonetheless, for many young people it is the family, imperfect as it is, that alongside significant others, provides the long-term support that gets them through their difficulties. I would like to have read more guidance for parents and siblings but maybe that is the next book and I would not want to detract from the major achievement of this one. I commend it to you.

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*Melancholia. The Diagnosis, Pathophysiology, and Treatment of Depressive Illness.* By M. A. Taylor and M. Fink. (Pp. 560; £85.00; ISBN 0521841518 hb.) Cambridge University Press: Cambridge. 2006.

Finding the 'true depressions' in the mass of human unhappiness is a difficult task. Few clinicians are happy with the present state of affairs where major depression dominates the classification but appears to comprise a wide range of conditions.

The authors present their view that melancholia is *the* depressive illness and have gathered evidence from a wide variety of sources to support this. They comprehensively review the

illness from its definition and recognition through its physiology to treatment, including a particular emphasis on electroconvulsive therapy (ECT).

It is an exceptionally well researched and heavily referenced (50 pages) book and provides a sound source for further reading. Despite this it is not a dense tome and is eminently readable and probably aimed at psychiatrists in general rather than those particularly involved in research. The authors are clearly committed and experienced clinicians who present a good combination of academic data and clinical experience, peppering the chapters with clinical examples. Some of these are fascinating glimpses into the dilemmas that we all face.

They give clear clinical advice on the management of melancholia and helping those that suffer from it. The specific treatments of tricyclic antidepressants and ECT are described in detail and strongly advocated. The selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors are effectively dismissed following a review focusing on the influence of the pharmaceutical industry. Psychological treatments are also given little attention.

Their clinical approach is an assertive and optimistic one, the advice they give is sound and applicable based on a recognition of the seriousness of the illness. However, some of the challenges of practising effective psychiatry are not

fully acknowledged. For example hospitalization is strongly advocated, in particular to deal with suicide risk but the constraints in pursuing this are not dealt with. Perhaps more of us should adopt their view and ensure that our wards are not only available to depressives but also places that are conducive to recovery. The controversy over ECT is presented (in a slightly despairing tone) as an irrational non-argument. Although this is probably true, it may not be the best method of persuasion.

If you are already a convert to the melancholia idea then this book will reinforce your view. If you are a doubter you will want to see a more balanced argument than is laid out here. Taylor and Fink are advocates rather than judges and they present a strong argument. Many of us would like to believe that the 'true depression' has been found but psychiatric nosology does not reveal its joints to carve down on as easily as they assert. Nevertheless, what they have succeeded in doing has been to spur me into looking at research on melancholia more thoroughly, which is undoubtedly good for me and hopefully for my patients and students too. A companion volume of the same thoroughness on the management of non-melancholic depression would be very welcome!

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