

On the down side, each chapter has its own page numbering system which I found slightly confusing and this may present problems with referencing. In addition, the book is quite large for a 'quick reference' text and this is partly due to a considerable amount of redundant space. Also, several notable areas are not discussed including ophthalmology and ENT. A whole chapter is devoted to AIDS rather than being incorporated into the infectious diseases chapter, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome is classified under 'infectious diseases' and the leukaemias are given a disproportionate amount of space at the expense of commoner disorders. There is also very little mention of urology and nothing on gynaecology and obstetrics. In addition, a section dealing with acute medicine/surgery and minor injuries would have been useful.

I did not sit down with the intention of reading this book from start to finish but instead used the book as and when clinical issues arose. I increasingly found myself using it and in the process discovered that my knowledge in some non-psychiatric areas was seriously "behind the times". The book is carefully and logically put together, it is clear to read and has relevant and up-to-date information. Although I would recommend this book for departmental libraries, to be most effective it should be used as a resource. This is not a book to inspire but it does provide useful and relevant information about physical disorders which will be helpful to psychiatrists.

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Psychopharmacology: An Introduction (3rd edn)

By René Spiegel. Chichester: John Wiley, 1996. 295 pp. £45 (hb). ISBN: 0 471 95729 1

This is the third edition of a single author book on psychopharmacology first published in 1983. It differs from most other texts in the field by virtue of its strong emphasis on historical development of the subject (did you know that Kraepelin did experiments on the effects of caffeine and performance in the 1890s?) and its emphasis on the human psychological aspects of psychopharmacology (the author is a

psychologist working in the drug industry). These aspects of the book give it both charm and interest and it stands as a complementary text to those written predominantly from a neurochemical or therapeutic perspective. Although this third revision was published in 1996, it lacks information on some of the newer drugs, such as sertraline, nefazodone and venlafaxine. Moreover, because it is written from a Swiss/German perspective (costings in Swiss Francs, for example), some of the drugs mentioned are not available in the UK. Translation from the German also provides some interesting idiosyncrasies.

Overall, this book should be read by all psychopharmacologists working with humans or animals. They will learn about the origins of their subject and will almost certainly enjoy the personal style. It would also appeal to scientific psychiatrists. Trainees should not rely on it as the sole psychopharmacology text for the MRCPsych examination.

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Quest for Answers: A Primer of Understanding and Treating Severe Personality Disorders

By Salman Akhtar. New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1995. 223 pp. £23.95 (hb)

The author of this book is a distinguished American psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who has published widely on a range of topics. Dr Akhtar outlines the various types of personality disorder and how they overlap and how they differ. There follows a structural description of such patients based on an analysis of the meaning of concepts such as 'identity', 'the self', 'superego defects', 'ego weakness' and 'splitting' etc. The entire work is outlined from a psychoanalytic perspective, yet includes some interesting deliberations on the relationship between personality disorders and mental illnesses such as affective disorders and schizophrenia. As such he sees a role for appropriate medication in some variants of personality disorder, thus bridging rather than distancing psychotherapy from psychiatry. Indications and contraindications to types of psychotherapy are outlined. There is also a useful section on types of transference and

the various problems that may be encountered by the therapist during the patient's therapeutic journey in search of emotional well-being.

The book culminates in deliberations on prognosis and outcome, with some useful reference to gender differences and separately to the risks of suicide; the highest being in female patients with a diagnosis of borderline personality disorder. Dr Akhtar reminds us that a history of suicidal gestures is frequent in such patients who do subsequently kill themselves and as such their self-injurious behaviour should not be lightly dismissed as merely attention-seeking. Although many patients successfully reach a stage of being able to separate from the therapist and lead their lives without such support, there are also a few patients who effectively require "a therapeutic life sentence", although this will usually be a form of occasional crisis intervention by the therapist rather than permanent regular therapy. With increasing age, there is also a tendency for some patients with severe personality disorder to partially or even fully recover or burn-out. In such patients it is therapeutic and even life-saving to offer support and treatment particularly through the more active years of early adulthood until middle age.

The book is valuable and should be read by anyone with an interest in personality disorder. Its disadvantage is that as with much American work, almost all the references are American and it therefore does not embrace a fully international perspective. Further, this and many other primarily psychoanalytic works use a form of vocabulary which even well educated psychiatrists might not be quite sure they understand. For example, in the initial part of the book, the author writes "Psychostructurally at this level of character organisation there is a restriction of the conflict-free ego, poor superego internalisation and integration, blurring of the ego-superego delimitation, and most important, the lack of an integrated self-concept resulting in the syndrome of identity diffusion". The style of the book is also unusual in that it is written as a series of expert answers to various questions, reminiscent almost of a catechism by a papal authority.

Although I found this book bemusing when I began reading it, I gradually found myself eager to read more of it and now that I have finished it I feel I know quite a lot more about personality disorders than previously.

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