

Concise Guide to Women's Mental Health

By Vivien K. Burt and Victoria C. Hendrick.
Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press.
1997. 168 pp. £21.00 (pb).
ISBN 0-88048-343-1

This is a pocket guide to women's mental health problems, providing practical and easily accessible information for psychiatrists and trainees. Dr Burt, founder of the UCLA Women's Life Centre, and her colleague Dr Hendrick approach their subject matter with enthusiasm and expertise. They offer us a whirlwind tour of the major reproductive life events and their associated psychopathology. Menstruation, contraception, pregnancy, childbirth, abortion, infertility, the menopause and gynaecological cancers are considered in turn. There is also a broader consideration of gender issues in the treatment of the major psychiatric disorders. At each stage the message is clear: the assessment and management of psychological difficulties should be considered in the wider context of a woman's biological state and her point in the reproductive life cycle.

Much is familiar in the chapters on pregnancy, postpartum disorders and the menopause. These chapters are factual and comprehensive. More interesting, to my mind, was the discussion of an iatrogenic condition: the psychological implications of infertility treatment. There is a sensitive and thoughtful account of the difficulties encountered by infertile couples undergoing treatment. This seems to be informed by insights gained from the authors' clinical experience with many such couples rather than merely a superficial review of scientific fact. This is also the only place in the book where relationships with men are mentioned in any depth. Elsewhere, there is the curious impression that women's psychological problems arise in a strictly biological, male-free zone.

Overall, there is much to admire. There is an abundance of useful tables. References are numerous, relevant and up to date. There is an integration of information from psychiatry, medicine, oncology, obstetrics and gynaecology. As such, this book should be of interest to psychologically aware trainees in several disciplines, not just psychiatry. One problem which, I suspect, will result in fewer sales than this book deserves is that the book is expensive for its size. The solution, perhaps, is to

consult a copy in a well-stocked medical library.

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Seminars in the Psychiatry of Learning Disabilities

Edited by Oliver Russell. London: Gaskell.
1997. 282 pp. £15.00 (pb). ISBN 1-901242-02-1

This book is one of the College Seminars series, aimed at trainee psychiatrists. It starts by describing those skills and knowledge which the College expects trainees to acquire in this field. This 'sets the scene' for a book which is written very clearly, with complex issues being explained in simple language, with helpful use of boxes by the contributors to highlight and summarise key points. References and suggested further reading are given at the end of the chapters, the latter being brief enough to be followed-up by interested readers.

Psychiatric disorders across the life-span are discussed with reference to their differing presentations in people with different levels of learning disabilities. Trainees new to the subject are often anxious about how to approach the assessment of someone with learning disabilities. They are unsure as to how relevant their present knowledge and skills are to their new situation. Several chapters are helpful in this context, but perhaps two chapters should be highlighted: that on 'Psychiatric disorders and severe disabilities', where the issue of diagnosing mental illness in this population is debated, and that on 'Communicating with people with learning disabilities'. This latter is a fascinating account of the development of communication, its assessment and the use of communication techniques. It provides lots of useful pointers, from the sophisticated to the more down-to-earth, such as "Do not cramp your style by too much formality, be an opportunist – sing, act, whistle, change your voice, gear and speech". This chapter is quite technical in parts but the use of such practical advice lightens the mood and enables the reader to persist. Reference is frequently made to the importance of looking at the social context in which the disorder occurs, and this is emphasised too in the chapters on the diagnosis of psychi-

atric disorders and on the various therapeutic interventions available. Of these latter, I found the chapters on the use of psychotropic drugs and on behavioural interventions particularly thought-provoking and stimulating.

The book provides a useful historical overview and chapters on classification and epidemiology which give a framework in which to view psychiatric disorders. Associated areas are discussed too: philosophical and ethical issues, epilepsy and forensic issues. All are important to the psychiatrist in training. The role and responsibilities of the psychiatrist in learning disabilities have changed over recent years. De-institutionalisation has progressed rapidly. The pattern of provision, including that of psychiatric services, in the community takes different forms in different parts of the UK. This can be confusing to trainees (and others) in psychiatry. It is vital that a clear overview of the topic is given. This book achieves this. It is also cheap. I will certainly recommend it to trainees.

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Understanding Post-Traumatic Stress: A Psychosocial Perspective on PTSD and Treatment

By Stephen Joseph, Ruth Williams & William Yule. Chichester: John Wiley. 1997. 187 pp.
£15.99 (pb)

In recent years there has been increasing research concerning post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This has been accompanied by a welcome increase in the number of books available that attempt to integrate and disseminate the research findings. The three psychologists who wrote this book are well known in the field, particularly for their work following the *Herald of Free Enterprise* disaster. The book is aimed at a wide readership and provides a good summary of a psychosocial perspective. The layout is simple and effective, with the well-defined aims of each chapter being covered and often illustrated with case studies before being complemented by a useful list of summary points. The flow of the book is good and balanced without problematic repetition.