

Book reviews

EDITED BY SIDNEY CROWN and ALAN LEE

Amphetamine Misuse: International Perspectives on Current Trends

Edited by Hilary Klee. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic. 1997. 330 pp. £14.00 (pb). ISBN 90-5702-0815

In their review of the rise in amphetamine use during the 1960s, Mitcheson *et al* put forward a potential solution. First, users had to be identified, the perennial problem for services. Second, they suggested that "there may be a place for very carefully considered prescribing of amphetamines". They could not predict that this almost apologetic statement would, in the light of international concerns over HIV, become enshrined as politically and socially acceptable practice regarding opiates in the new doctrine of harm reduction. Despite evidence of significant injecting behaviour and risk-taking in excess of that among opiate injectors in some studies, prescribing of amphetamines remains controversial and rare. This is just one of the inconsistencies touched on in this interesting review which sees its role as remedying the neglect of amphetamine misuse among governments and researchers. Lofty aims – and they nearly pull it off.

The book is a global enterprise, comprising reviews of amphetamine use and public policy across Europe, North America, Australia and Japan. Differences between nations are emphasised but this reader was more impressed with international similarities, in the relentless march of drug use and the increasingly desperate political responses that follow. The continuing lack of success of proscriptive policies and the glaring inconsistencies in legal approaches to different substances of misuse is highlighted.

I would have preferred a chapter layout that allowed more direct comparisons between nations. The book presents an, at times, confusing mix of information from national databases, prevalence studies and

qualitative reports. Some chapters include detailed information on ecstasy use, which is not covered in discussions on other areas of the world. The attempt to draw findings together in the final chapter is not entirely successful, though this may be more a reflection of the complexity of the problem and our still scant knowledge. The book remains a valiant attempt to redress our ignorance in this area. It is the most comprehensive review of the literature to date and will be of particular interest to those wishing to broaden their knowledge of the epidemiology of amphetamine use.

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Depression and Physical Illness (Perspectives in Psychiatry Volume 6)

Edited by M. M. Robertson & C. L. E. Katona.
Chichester. John Wiley and Sons. 1996.
564 pp. £60 (hb). ISBN 0-471-96148-5

Liaison psychiatry is gradually establishing its role within general hospital settings. There is a development in the UK from poorly coordinated trouble-shooting exercises in general hospitals towards a targeted consultation liaison service dealing with the psychological component of patients' presentations. Clinical and trust managers recognise such an approach as being not only more satisfying but also more cost-effective. The literature reveals wide variations in the prevalence of depression in the context of physical illness, a fact which is certainly related to methodological problems. Liaison psychiatrists know, however,

that the majority of referrals made to their department will have the term 'depression' mentioned somewhere in the referral.

A comprehensive book on this topic is timely and a newly appointed consultant given the task of setting up liaison psychiatry services welcomes the opportunity to review such a book (and add it to his bookshelf). The book addresses three main areas: general issues on epidemiology, recognition and treatment of depression; depression and physical illness in relation to life cycle; depression and specific physical conditions (the largest section). Each chapter is written by an international author giving the reader the opportunity of sharing knowledge with eminent specialists. Variability of focus and lack of cohesiveness are frequently the disadvantages of multi-author books and this volume, unfortunately, is no exception. Most chapters are particularly strong on topics related to epidemiology and aetiology. The discussion of treatment plans places heavy emphasis on pharmacological therapy, giving the crucial psychological approach not enough space for my taste. I have an open mind whether or not this is related to the book series being sponsored by a drug company. Some topics, such as depression in transplant surgery, dementia, or spinal cord injury, are missing. In comparison to the chapters on deliberate self-harm and diabetes mellitus, I would have given chapters on hyper- and hypo-parathyroidism substantially less space. The (immensely readable) article on depression in doctors does not appear to be relevant to the title and purpose of the book. All reference lists are impressive and relevant.

Those who are planning to set up liaison psychiatry services will find the wealth of information on epidemiological data helpful. The up-to-date reference lists make it a useful book for those engaged in a related research project. If a clinician is looking for guidance on psychological approaches to depression in physical illness, he will be disappointed. The book would certainly be a worthwhile addition to a psychiatric library.

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