

approach to classification of depression and its epidemiological investigation. Expectations for combating depression seemed to the reviewer to be somewhat naive in the light of the almost negligible psychiatric manpower in the underdeveloped countries. Pharmacological assessment and investigations are still in an embryonic stage and treatment, despite the development of drugs, largely empirical.

There is advantage in the new classifications for epidemiological studies. Amongst the interesting concepts expressed were cultural differences in depressive content with less guilt and conscience in the African countries and underprivileged groups. One surprising feature was a paper from Japan which finds that patients on maintenance therapy showed a higher rate of relapse and a great impairment of social adjustment than those without maintenance therapy during the 5 year period of follow-up. The assessment, however, was not a prospective study and distribution, which was not a random distribution, may have weighted the maintenance group with severe cases.

On the whole the book is an interesting collection of papers with potential for better identification and classification of depression but with over-optimistic expectation for success in the scene of prevention and treatment. The very good bibliography following each chapter in itself makes the book worth purchasing for library use.

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Stressful Life Events and their Contexts. Edited by **BARBARA SNELL DOHRENWEND**. New York: Neale Watson Academic Publications. 1981. Pp 287. \$12.95.

With this publication life events research comes of age. The honeymoon period of naively attempting to link external happenings and psychosocial disruption or breakdown is over, and this book, which includes contributions by many experts in the field, explains why. What is an event? How should events be defined? Can they validly be measured by a simple scale such as that associated with Rahe, or do they need the complex interview-rating methodology developed by G. W. Brown? How valid and reliable are peoples' memories of events of the previous year?

In several chapters the person to whom the events happen is considered. Lazarus thoughtfully dissects the concept of 'denial'; Lefcourt shows the relevance of locus of control theory. The tenuous conceptual base and shaky psychometric validation of the Type A, coronary-prone personality comes as a revelation. Surely a case of the personality industry conning the hypochondriacal American public?

Social factors that may render an individual susceptible to, or protect him from, the impact of an event are discussed. Social support networks seem particularly relevant.

This book is clear, incisive and constructively critical. It provides essential reading for the potential research worker in this field.

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Death and Dying: A Quality of Life. Edited by **PATRICIA F. PEGG** and **ERNO METZE**. London: Pitman Books. 1981. Pp 190. £15.00.

This collection of papers covers a wider range of topics than its title suggests and some of them will be of great value to those working directly in the fields they cover and also to the liaison psychiatrist and social worker. Obstetricians and paediatricians will appreciate a group of papers on stillbirths and cot deaths: and one on perinatal death, which also contains a sensitive appraisal of the meaning of the funeral, which is largely applicable to all age groups.

A stimulating paper on coronary care shows through case material how the family, and especially the spouse, should be included in treatment and rehabilitation. Two papers on bereavement add to our knowledge of the subject. One emphasises the importance of self control as well as catharsis in grief. Other topics well covered include staff training and support, techniques for overcoming ill effects of the fear of recurrence and death in malignant disease, and some aspects of bereavement counselling.

Few will buy this book for themselves, because of its cost, but many should have access to it in a library.

AVERIL STEDEFORD, *Senior Registrar in Psychotherapy, The Warneford Hospital and Sir Michael Sobell House, Oxford*

Psychotherapeutic Treatment of Cancer Patients. Edited by **JANE GOLDBERG**. New York: The Free Press. 1981. Pp 364. \$25.00.

Most of the 20 contributors to this book are psychologists or psychoanalysts in private practice in North America. Despite the title, much of it concerns the role of psychosomatic factors in the aetiology of cancer. Some well-known theories, such as the 'cancer prone personality' who exhibits 'pathological niceness' and cannot express anger, and the excess of depression and stressful life events as precursors of cancer, are discussed but there is little attempt to evaluate the evidence for them. There is other highly speculative material, for example a cyst on a young man's neck is described in turn as a fantasised foetus and as a castrated testicle, and its removal as symbolic