

History of the Introduction of Lithium into Medicine and Psychiatry

Birth of modern psychopharmacology 1949: Johan Schioldann, 2009: Adelaide Academic Press in collaboration with Brascoe Publishing. ISBN 978-0-9805477-0-2

It is interesting to note that this book is 'Printed in Australia, ... on 100% recycled stock'. The story it holds is by no means recycled and though Schioldann himself is of Danish extraction he is presently an Australian Emeritus Professor from the University of Adelaide.

The story he tells is not new, but one that is crucial to the evolution of modern psychopharmacology, in particular, the 'biography of lithium (therapy)'. The book, though single-authored, has been contributed to extensively by key figures and authorities such as John Cade, Mogens Schou and Samuel Gershon. It is written in readable prose with extensive annotations and footnotes and spans 30 chapters. Three appendices that delve into aspects of Carl Lange, John Cade and Mogens Schou supplement the many chapters that are split into two sections. The first section tackles the birth of lithium therapy from 1859 onwards. This is a riveting account of the initial

discoveries, insights, thoughts and inferences made by researchers in the 19th century. This section of the book also provides an understanding of the medical context within which initial investigations into the actions of lithium were conducted and the importance of prevailing models of disease. The second section of the book describes the renaissance of lithium therapy and the birth of modern psychopharmacology beginning with John Cade's (re) discovery of lithium. Apart from being chronological, the deliberate partitioning of the book into two sections and the presentation of two periods of discovery is fundamental to the debate that the author wishes to excite regarding the crediting of lithium's psychotropic properties. The Lange brothers clearly have primacy as regards observations with respect to the properties of lithium, but given that these were not fully translated into clinical practice, and the psychotropic use of lithium was not sustained, this assigns significant importance to the 20th century pioneers that refined its indications and promulgated its use.

The book is a lithium treasure trove. It contains rare and valuable historical

information that would be difficult to find elsewhere. For instance, the many personal communications and first hand accounts enrich the text immeasurably. However, Schioldann has been careful not to simply report findings. Instead he has woven fact and opinion beautifully into narrative that tells a story, and in so doing maintains the reader's interest. Further, he is to be applauded for providing a clear and succinct account of complicated events and making the many complex issues easy to comprehend.

All psychiatrists and anyone that is interested in lithium should read this book. However, its size and detail will most likely relegate it to use primarily as a reference, in which case I recommend that every library acquire a copy.

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