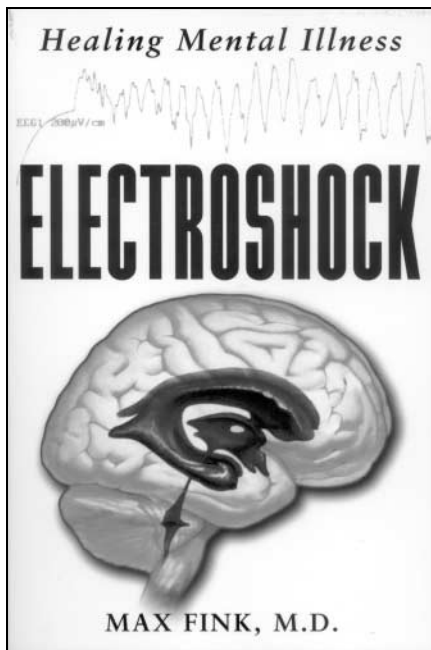


Book reviews

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Electroshock: Healing Mental Illness

By Max Fink. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2002. 157 pp. £8.99 (pb). ISBN 0 19 515804 0



Electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) remains controversial as the only physical treatment originating in the first part of the last century still in widespread use. Deriders seem plentiful but public advocates of its increased use are few. Max Fink is a well-known author on this subject, with much of his work aimed at a professional audience. *Electroshock: Healing Mental Illness*, written when the author was in his late 70s, is an impassioned argument for ECT to be considered as an effective and safe treatment by both the public and psychiatrists. The slim volume is illustrated extensively with clinical vignettes, based on his experience and published cases.

The book consists of three sections. The first describes what happens during ECT, and discusses the risks, contraindications and indications for its use. In the second Fink discusses the history of ECT both in terms of its development and the subsequent controversy. The final section

contains appendices, notes and an extensive bibliography. In general the style is jargon-free and easy to follow, with well-written informative chapters, particularly on the origins and history of ECT. However, little space is given to clinical trials or meta-analysis. *Electroshock* is written primarily for the American public which means that issues pertaining to the Mental Health Act 1983 are not covered, and the issue of signing for consent by relatives may confuse a non-American reader. Drugs are referred to by their trade names, although a useful appendix gives both the generic equivalents and their use.

As the UK sees further pressure to restrict the use of ECT, following guidance from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, it is a valuable reminder that unnecessarily withholding ECT may deny patients an effective and even life-saving treatment.

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Fighting for Mental Health. A Personal View

By Norman Sartorius. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2002. 252 pp. £29.95 (hb). ISBN 0 521 58243 1

'Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in
information?'

(T. S. Eliot, *The Rock*, 1934)

This book is a delight to read. By one of our leading international psychiatrists, it brings both wisdom and knowledge to bear on many key issues that the mental health movement currently faces. It is a collection of essays, some written especially for the book, others based on previous writings and lectures. The introduction gives us a fascinating insight into the development of Sartorius the psychiatrist – his desire to study medicine, to move into psychiatry

and to include psychology in his portfolio; he describes a formative influence on his subsequent approach to mental health, and his desire to seek out a broader strategic role. 'In order to make the best use of my working life', he writes, 'I applied myself to strengthen psychiatry, ethically and scientifically as a profession; I sought ways of bringing psychiatry closer to medicine for the benefit of both; and I tried to see ways in which political tools can be used to improve education, research and training in the field of mental health and in developing mental health programmes.'

The first group of essays examines the sociocultural context for mental health, including a discussion of social capital and the balance between rights and responsibilities, controversially challenging developmental dogmas such as concern about population growth in low-income countries, and the value of health services research in such countries. He tackles conceptual confusion vigorously. Instead of quailing before the problem he is intrigued by the health care possibilities that increasing urbanisation affords.

The second group of essays looks at the interface between mental health and general health care (there is some overlap between the chapter on primary health care and the chapter on general health care, but both chapters are well worth reading). Chapter 10 is an engrossing inside history of the mental health division of the World Health Organization (WHO) and a reminder of our loss with Sartorius's departure from the WHO.

The third group focuses on psychiatry, and one chapter asks why we are not doing more on prevention. Sartorius did much to stimulate conceptual thinking on prevention in the 1980s when it was deeply unfashionable. He is also passionate about the need to tackle stigma, which occurs with surprising intensity at all levels of social structures. I particularly liked the chapter on research in psychiatry where he points out that the current emphasis on operational criteria has prematurely reified our classification systems and their reliability at the expense of enhancing validity in relation to phenomenology, laboratory findings and epidemiology.

This is a book to savour: it is enjoyable as a straight read, perhaps on a long flight, but is also a book for the bedside, to dip into from time to time. There is plenty to agree with, some things to disagree with; but above all this book is contemporary