

anticonvulsant drugs pop up all over the place, most attesting to the superiority of carbamazepine over other competitors. This is not an easy area to research, even less to read about and for those readers who do not have epilepsy clinics, the account provided in Ossetin's chapter may provide a more than adequate summary. There is an excellent section on epilepsy in childhood. This is a book that can be recommended without reserve to those who spend a fair proportion of their professional lives dealing with epileptic patients. Others (and these will include the majority of psychiatrists) should encourage their local library to make copies available.

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Current Topics in Neuroendocrinology. Edited by D. GANTEN and D. PFAFF. Berlin: Springer Verlag. 1988. 335 pp. DM 175.

This is an excellent review of the neuroendocrinology of depression, written in a form that will be accessible to someone who is developing an interest in biological psychiatry.

The first chapter, by Frixe, describes the genomic and non-genomic actions of oestrogen, glucocorticoids and thyroxine. I found these extremely interesting, and they could well be relevant to puerperal psychosis and the psychoses associated with Cushing's syndrome and myxoedema. There follows a fairly standard chapter on CRF and depression, which includes the hypothesis that CRF overproduction may cause depression. I don't believe this hypothesis, since CRF overproduction seems to be present also in non-depressed patients with agoraphobia and anorexia nervosa, but the argument is interesting and the clinical effects of CRF antagonists will be of great interest.

Mendlewicz & Linkowski give a scholarly and appropriately cautious review of hormonal rhythms in depression. Other highlights include a thorough review of adrenoceptor function in depression by Matussek, Metzger on 5HT and hormones in depression, Janowsky on acetyl choline and hormones in depression, Post on kindling, Ferrier & Crow on CCK in schizophrenia, and quite a bit else.

I strongly recommend this book.

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Can We Prevent Suicide? By DAVID LESTER. New York: AMS Press. 1989. \$34.50.

David Lester is a well-known figure in suicide research. During his distinguished career he has published numerous papers on suicide, counselling, and related

issues. This short book comprises twelve essays or papers on subjects related to suicide, much of which has been published elsewhere, but none of the papers are direct copies of previous work. It is a fascinating and valuable volume; fascinating because the reader can follow the evolution of the author's views over a period of years and see that it has been profoundly influenced by his acquisition of knowledge about his subject, and valuable because it explores the subject broadly and critically relates suicide to other aspects of the human condition.

It is difficult to pick out any one particular part of the book for special attention. The chapters addressing the question of whether we should prevent suicide are particularly interesting and challenging, and have a relevance that goes beyond suicide and attempted suicide. There are two chapters (or essays) on telephone counselling; these too raise important issues with wider implications than the overall title of the book would suggest. The section on the possibility of suicide prevention starts with a somewhat pessimistic chapter, and ends with a more optimistic view. In his introduction Lester explains that the earlier chapter was written before he had assimilated the data on the effects of gun control laws on the incidence of suicide. His opinion was changed by those data. He says, "The impact of strict handgun control statutes on suicide rates have convinced me that restricting the methods available for suicide will have an impact on the suicide rates". Interestingly, this view is similar to that held by William Farr, who wrote in 1863, "In certain states the mind appears to be fascinated . . . by the presence of a fatal instrument . . . and the withdrawal of the means of deaths suffices to save the life"!

Lester's new book deserves to be read, studied, and discussed. It is an important contribution to the literature.

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Life's Preservative Against Self-Killing. By JOHN SYM. Routledge: London. 395 pp. 1989. £29.95.

In the space of seven years, between 1974 and 1981, Ida Macalpine and her son Richard Hunter, the orb and sceptre of British psychiatric historians, vanished from the scene. They left behind them a vast storehouse of knowledge, including a series of reprints of psychiatric monographs. All of them are of prime importance in that they resurrected seminal works which, because of their rarity and costliness, are unavailable to the ordinary reader, or, indeed, to the general run of psychiatric libraries. The book under review follows this honourable tradition, and the scholarship of Michael MacDonald, Professor of History at the University of Michigan, who writes the introduction, compares very favourably with these written by his august forerunners.