

represents a précis of the treatment approach employed in a recent study comparing couples therapy with antidepressant medication in the acute management of depression. In their introduction, the authors suggest that the book has two objectives. First, to provide information and knowledge required for training in couples therapy. Second, to record the techniques used in the depression study to allow comparison with and/or inform future research trials of this therapy. Although this is a tall order for such a brief text, I think that the book goes a considerable way towards these two stated goals and its five chapters make interesting reading for novice and experienced therapists alike.

Anyone wishing to explore whether a partner or significant other can be of help to someone who is depressed will find sections of this text worthwhile. It provides useful and accessible ideas about how to formulate and intervene in such situations. However, the relative brevity of the overview on the conceptualisation of depression and the descriptions of the techniques used mean that the text may not function as a training manual in its own right. Novice therapists would need to supplement this book with training workshops, practical demonstrations or other opportunities for skill development in order to feel confident that they could faithfully apply the therapy model. That said, the strength of this text is that it does manage to meet some of the needs of therapists of all levels of expertise. Experienced practitioners who are more familiar with the philosophy and techniques of the therapy will enjoy reading about the acknowledged similarities and differences in the authors' therapeutic styles and hypothesising about the impact on the process and outcome of therapy.

Jan Scott University Department of Psychological Medicine, Gartnavel Royal Hospital, Glasgow G12 0XH, UK

Women, Health and the Mind

Edited by Lorraine Sherr & Janet St Lawrence. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons. 2000. 388 pp. £19.99 (pb). ISBN 0 471 99879 6

To Henry Maudsley, in the 1870s, it seemed that the novel American approach to education for women was probably to

blame for an inability of American mothers to nurse their children and for their increasing emotional instability. 'There is sex in mind', he remarked, 'as distinctly as sex in body' (Maudsley, 1874). He evaluated the competing hypotheses of male oppression *v.* innate disposition and decided in favour of the latter.

The debate continues, but what has changed? This book is an attempt to contribute to the concept of 'women's health studies' in a way similar to the academic development of 'women's studies'. One of the key components of this approach is that women contribute to the debate and do not just remain as observed objects. In addition, medical assumptions and research are looked at more closely to see whether the needs of women are being met. Classic findings include the frequent failure to involve women as subjects in the evaluation of pharmaceuticals, although their physiologies are clearly different, and the failure to recognise gender differences of presentation in cardiovascular disease. These topics are by now quite well rehearsed, however, and there is a more general recognition that looking at gender differences in disease can benefit understanding of its processes.

In terms of 'the mind' this book promises more than it delivers, as only one of its five sections is about mental health and this includes a chapter on women as stand-up comics! There are some interesting ideas, none the less – for instance, in the chapter by de Ridder on

gender, stress and coping I learned that women are more sensitive to signals of short-term stress than men are. This can lead to apparent greater 'fussiness', but may be adaptive in, for example, the prevention of illness and better adaptation to a serious long-term stress. Men are inclined to ignore and avoid minor early-warning signs, which may be appropriate for many short-term situations that right themselves, but leaves them unprepared for serious long-term situations. And did you know that the house interiors of agoraphobic women are more 'personalised'?

The chapters tend to more general descriptions than is necessary for mental health professionals and my recommendation would be that the ideas of some of the authors – such as Jane Ussher – deserve further study, but that an edited collection is not the ideal format for this.

Maudsley, H. (1874) Sex in mind and education. *Fortnightly Review*, 15, 466–483.

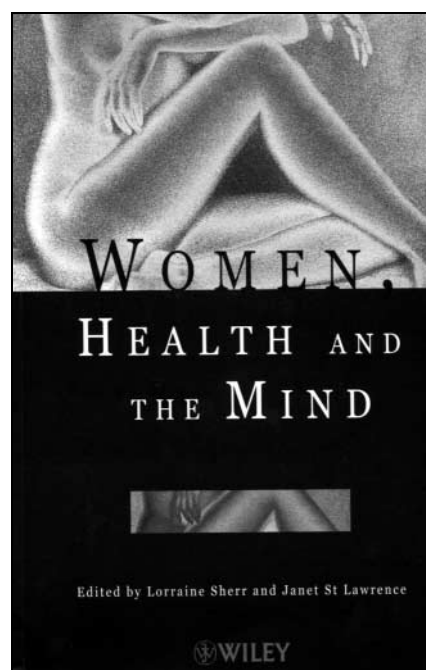
Fiona Subotsky Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist, Belgrave Department of Child and Family Psychiatry, King's College Hospital, London SE5 9RS, UK

New Oxford Textbook of Psychiatry

Edited by M. G. Gelder, Juan J. López-Ibor Jr & Nancy C. Andreasen. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2000. 2 vols, 2132 pp. £195.00 (hb). ISBN 0 19 262970 0.

The sheer size of this beautifully produced two-volume textbook begged a cherry-picking approach as a realistic alternative to months of full-time reading – by the end of which time review, reviewer and text might all be out of date!

Basic sciences are covered to the likely satisfaction of trainees preparing for examinations or psychiatrists engaged in continuing professional development. More space might have been given to evidence-based psychiatry (Geddes), in light of the importance accorded this area in training of psychiatrists. Risk assessment and prediction of violence (Mullen) will intimidate some clinicians, particularly those unable to interpret legal jargon: it is nicely balanced by Gunn and Wheat on principles of mental law. Service provision (Thorncroft and others) to populations and communities is



covered in a series of contributions, none of which quite tests the goodness of fit of a strong private sector to a social model of care delivery. Short pieces on US health maintenance organisations (HMOs) and Australian services might not have gone amiss. Psychiatric intensive care units (PICUs) are not discussed outside forensic settings. Cooper and Oates communicate the essence of clinical assessment. Berrios and Pichot, as always, write well on the history of ideas and of clinical psychiatry, respectively. Slavney and Mc Hugh wrestle with the impossible task of making the education and training of psychiatrists entertaining: no doubt unintentionally, they convey that only in Baltimore is the matter properly understood. Suicide is addressed by Hawton and others in three essays, each of which skirts around the embarrassing possibility that psychiatrists may *never* know how to reliably predict or prevent it. Johnstone on the treatment of schizophrenia is good but could be better: she spends too much time on oral chlorpromazine and too little on novel antipsychotics, depot medication or the challenge of depressive symptoms. Parker on the classification of mood disorders is idiosyncratic. Goldberg and others rehearse widely respected views on the psychiatry of primary care without giving away how little real progress there has been over the past 40 years in this important field. Ballenger, in an otherwise excellent essay, merits some criticism for his implied preference for benzodiazepines as best evidence-based medication for panic disorder. Paykel and Scott, in a crafted essay on the treatment of mood disorders, balance perfectly the respective importance of pharmacological and psychotherapeutic interventions. Fink's assertion of the continuing importance of

electroconvulsive therapy is as convincing as it is necessary, but would have been even better with more attention to transcranial magnetic stimulation. A strong team on eating disorders (Russell, Fairburn and others) gives little hope that certain aetiological riddles will soon be solved. Brockington on perinatal psychiatry refreshingly debunks fads about depression in pregnancy, postnatal depression and 'post-abortion psychosis'. A team led by Mayou deals thoroughly with unexplained medical symptoms and other important issues bearing on medicine and psychiatry. Despite a scholarly introduction by López-Ibor and several interesting essays, personality disorder remains, here as elsewhere, psychiatry's Achilles' heel. Tyrer and Davidson (on management) had an unenviable task; with literally nothing evidence-based to offer, they round on colleagues who (like me) are prejudiced against admitting antisocial patients to general in-patient settings. This piece cannot in safety be read in isolation from the welcome essay on ethics (Fulford and Bloch) presented elsewhere.

Lack of expertise prevents me from commenting on specialist sections in any depth, but those on psychotherapy, child psychiatry, 'mental retardation', old age psychiatry, neuropsychiatry and forensic psychiatry look to be very good, including a piece on sequelae of brain injury (Fleminger) which is quite exemplary. The section on the contribution of psychodynamics is, unusually, a model of clarity. Henderson on epidemiology and Brown on sociology make their subjects come alive. And this is just a random selection.

This text is a serious heavyweight contender for all medical and departmental library short-lists of essential items. An important editorial achievement is the

success with which even the most esoteric aspects of psychiatry have been made accessible to the general professional reader, suggesting that the work will make an educational impact well beyond specialist psychiatric practice. There is something here for everybody. Initially sceptical, I already treasure my own (free) copy. As in all texts aiming to be comprehensive, omissions can be found if one looks hard enough and not all 273 contributions can be of uniform excellence. Yet the general standard of writing is very high and printing, illustration and indexing leave nothing to be desired. An eclectic approach and international flavour are welcome innovations in a text of this size. The necessary breadth of the work says much about the historic failure of psychiatry to define its own boundaries. Nowadays, declarations of interest should be required of all authors whenever pharmacotherapeutic subjects arise. Inevitably, some sections will shortly become out of date: the withdrawal of droperidol, restriction of thioridazine, white matter abnormalities in the frontal lobes of people with antisocial personality disorder, new evidence for efficacy of cognitive therapies in delusional disorders and advances in molecular genetics are some latecomers waiting in the wings. An electronic version of the text, continually updated, would be a major and welcome innovation that could be unreservedly recommended: otherwise, dinosaur status will threaten unless new editions appear at unusual frequency and regularity. As of now, this may be the foremost international textbook of psychiatry.

T. J. Fahy Emeritus Professor of Psychiatry,
Clinical Science Institute, National University of
Ireland, Galway, Ireland