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Assessment Scales in Old Age Psychiatry, Second Edition

Burns, A., Lawlor, B., Craig, S.
 London: Martin Dunitz, 2004,
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This reference book comprises an extensive collection of scales, useful both in clinical and research practice. As a clinician taking tentative steps into research, I found the book helpful on both counts. There are 241 scales in all, grouped into chapters. The major chapters, including depression and cognitive assessment, begin with useful accounts of scale development in that area; towards the end of the book a more motley selection of scales are grouped together for completeness. Completeness certainly appears to be the aim of the book; in searching for scales for a current project, I found the vast majority were included. In fact the book proves invaluable as a

starting point for those contemplating study protocols, as it provides a key reference and a contact address for the authors of each scale. It also gives other practical information, such as the time taken and who is qualified to rate the scale. This is of great benefit, as it enables the reader to rule out quickly inappropriate scales and focus their efforts on those most suitable.

Each scale has a short commentary, providing reliability and validity data when available. The authors point out that presenting such scale characteristics in a standardised format would have been ideal but that this information is not generally available. One might hope that in future, scales could be required to conform to standardisation criteria prior to being considered for publication.

It might have been useful to have a measure of the popularity of scales. However, any such 'pecking order' would be controversial and the reader cannot

expect to have all the information handed to them on a plate. Instead the book is a useful starting point, helping the reader to choose particular scales, which they can then investigate further.

The neuropsychology chapter is a new addition and although of interest, its remit does not meet the inclusive nature of the rest of the book. It has by necessity included a selection only, and it is open to debate as to why others have been left out.

Regarding clinical use, where outcome measures are all important, there are a number of scales we all use regularly, plus others that perhaps we should use more. This book is a useful prompt from which to broaden our clinical practice, and should prove invaluable to clinicians, of all disciplines, working in the field of old age psychiatry.

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