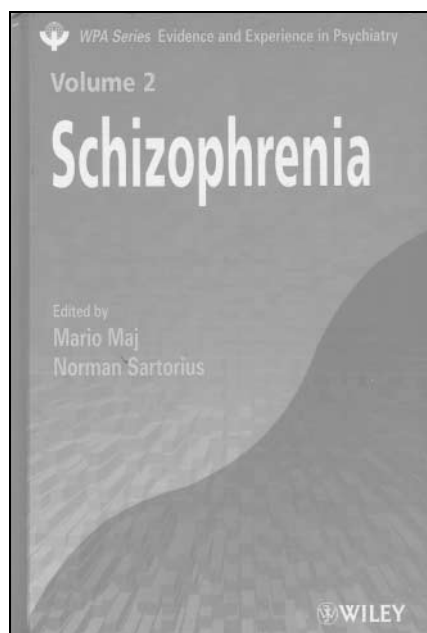


## Book reviews

EDITED BY SIDNEY CROWN and ALAN LEE

### Schizophrenia

Edited by Mario Maj & Norman Sartorius.  
Chichester: John Wiley & Sons. 1999. 492 pp.  
£60.00 (hb). ISBN 0 471 99906 7



This book, the second volume in the World Psychiatric Association's series 'Evidence and Experience in Psychiatry', was a pleasure to review. One can dip in and out of it at random to find an important aspect of schizophrenia summarised in a few paragraphs. It is a collection of six review articles, followed by expert commentaries, thus combining research evidence with clinical experience. The reviews cover diagnosis, pharmacological and psychotherapeutic treatments, prevention of disability and stigma, schizophrenia spectrum disorders and the cost of treating schizophrenia. Each concludes by summarising consistent evidence, incomplete evidence and areas open to research. The commentaries vary in quality, scope and length. Some emphasise particular aspects of the review, others elaborate on areas not covered, while a few explore or espouse the individual interests of the commentator.

The reviews are all well written, balanced and up-to-date. Given their ambitious scope, it is not surprising that individual areas get sketchy attention. The

first article and commentaries express the well-rehearsed limitations of the diagnostic term without stating what should replace it. While atypical antipsychotics are only briefly covered in the review of pharmacological treatments, several commentators mention their superiority, highlighting the current lack of consensus. In an otherwise excellent review of psychotherapeutic treatments focusing on four well-researched modalities, the authors omit the area of interaction between psychological treatments and medication. Several commentaries note the exclusion of dynamic treatments from the review. The chapter on stigma and disability is the longest, most discursive and least focused. Schizophrenia spectrum disorders, not an area of great academic interest, is reviewed commendably. Cloninger's criticism of spectrum concepts makes superb reading, as he compares the shifting diagnostic boundaries between ICD and DSM to "moving around the chairs on the top deck of an ocean liner which is sinking because of a gaping hole in the bow". The final article is an excellent introduction to health economics and methods of economic evaluation. It also summarises the current evidence for the greater cost-effectiveness of the atypicals.

The book is for whetting appetites rather than providing a substantial meal. Most people will find something of their particular interest, but no one is likely to find an exhaustive appraisal of an area. It is designed for an international readership, and some commentaries, such as those on continental concepts of schizophrenia, or experience of stigma in the less industrialised world, are rarely found together in one volume. However, the price is disproportionately steep, given that the book is likely to have a short shelf-life. Post-graduate libraries with money to spare may consider it a worthy addition. For those seeking an in-depth exploration of aspects of schizophrenia, the breadth of this volume will be scant compensation.

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### Dementia

Edited by Mario Maj & Norman Sartorius.  
Chichester: John Wiley & Sons. 2000. 392 pp.  
£60.00 (hb). ISBN 0 471 60698 7

Textbooks are undergoing an evolution. First, there was the single-author textbook, which was usually held to be definitive or, at least, authoritative. This was replaced more recently by edited textbooks, for which experts wrote chapters on their areas of specific interest. This book – the third in the World Psychiatric Association's series 'Evidence and Experience in Psychiatry' – is an example of the next stage in this evolution. The format involves a series of reviews on topics within dementia, each review followed by commentaries. The reviews focus on: definition and epidemiology; clinical diagnosis; neuropsychological and instrumental diagnosis; pharmacological treatments; psychosocial interventions; and the costs of dementia.

Although the book purports to be evidence-based, it does not quite get there. For example, the reviews, although on the whole well written and fairly comprehensive, are not systematic. There is no attempt to identify all available published and unpublished evidence or to quality-filter the evidence identified, and no attempt to synthesise the results into a meta-analysis. As they stand the reviews therefore merely reflect the opinions of the authors.

The commentaries are similar in format to peer-review commentaries, and therein lies one of the strengths of this book. For example, the chapter on definition and epidemiology has 14 commentaries, each with a slightly different focus, and the commentary authors read like a *Who's Who of Old Age Psychiatry*. Each commentary is about two pages long and is followed by its own reference list.

The principal advantage of this way of arranging a textbook is that a vast number of experts are able to contribute. Unfortunately, however, many of the commentaries start with rather congenial commendations of the authors of the reviews, which is a bit wearisome after a while. Indeed, it seems that some authors of the commentaries are rather reticent about disagreeing with the reviews.

Is this book useful? Yes, it is. Although it falls between the two stools of the conventional textbook and systematic reviews, it is a great compendium of up-to-date facts and opinions. However, there is too little application of evidence-based