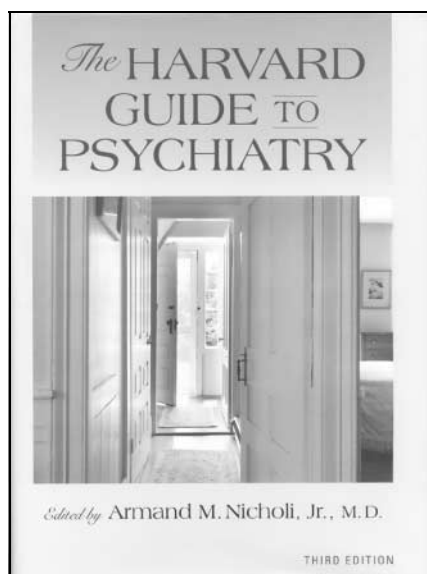


## Book reviews

EDITED BY SIDNEY CROWN and ALAN LEE

### The Harvard Guide to Psychiatry (3rd edn)

Edited by Armand M. Nicholi Jr.  
Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.  
1999. 856 pp. £46.95 (hb).  
ISBN 0-674-37570-X



Whatever the questions we may have about the market for such a textbook in the UK, there is no doubt it is a remarkable achievement: its coverage is vast, its style lucid, concise and readable and its judgements well balanced.

In addition to standard accounts of psychiatric syndromes we have informative reviews of neuroimaging, neural substrates of behaviour and the neurobiology of mental disorders and sleep problems. The chapters on electroconvulsive therapy and sex therapy are sensible and relevant to practice in this country. Unexpected but welcome in such a volume is a contribution on clinical hypnosis, advancing the controversial claim that “a rich body of experimental evidence supports the application of hypnosis in psychotherapeutic and medical settings”. The chapter entitled ‘The person confronting death’ deserves a wide readership.

Unfortunately, this excellent volume cannot be recommended to UK trainee psychiatrists as their sole textbook. It gives little attention to ICD-10 classification or

the European literature (beyond psychoanalytic writings). Its discussion of psychopathology is largely psychoanalytically based (although such a bias is not evident in the major part of the text). The listings of psychotropic drugs may seem confusing. Its account of ‘managed care’ does not translate easily to the community-oriented model we are struggling to implement in this country. And, of course, there are no caveats concerning mental health legislation when it is stated that psychosurgery is favoured for the treatment of the refractory patient with obsessive-compulsive disorder. It can, however, be warmly recommended to a postgraduate library, where it will be read in the context of more local writings.

For such a store of information and wisdom it is very modestly priced.

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**David Julier** Locum Consultant Psychiatrist,  
Adult Mental Health Department, Littlemore  
Mental Health Centre, Oxford OX4 4XN

### Difficult Clinical Problems in Psychiatry

Edited by Malcolm Lader & Deiter Naber.  
London: Martin Dunitz. 1999. 246 pp.  
£39.95 (hb). ISBN 1-85317-550-1

We are in the age of evidence-based practice. By now we should all be thoroughly versed in the skills of critical appraisal. Our ideal response to any clinical conundrum should be to find time for the working up of a ‘critically appraised topic’, during which we perform an up-to-the-minute trawl of Medline and the internet (using an impeccable search strategy, of course) and then distil out the wisdom we require through razor-sharp methodological dissection of the papers we find. The real world, of course, still lags a little behind this, and hard-pressed clinicians may have neither the time nor the aptitudes to engage in the process described. Enter *Difficult Clinical Problems in Psychiatry*. This is one of those

handbooks that appear from time to time seeking to provide a reference point for advice on the management of some common intractable problems.

Many of the chapter headings cover predictable (if well loved) favourites such as refractory schizophrenia, treatment-resistant unipolar depression and unstable manic-depression. Others go into less frequently charted areas such as treatment of panic and behavioural disturbances in old age. One or two sub-speciality areas are discussed, for example anorexia nervosa and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Taken together, however, the topics span a broad range of clinical issues which daily challenge many a jobbing clinician. How helpful is the material provided? Well, none of the chapters purports to be a systematic review, but they are all written by recognised authorities in their field and some internationally known opinion leaders. For the most part the contributions are readable, although it is in the nature of the beast that the wish to be comprehensive in content in a finite space leads at times to heavy-going reading and sometimes a disappointingly cursory treatment of certain issues. In the chapter on improving compliance, for instance, the model of compliance therapy developed by Kemp, Hayward and David at the Institute of Psychiatry is cited once, but the treatment approach itself is not described at all. This seems a pity given the attractiveness and proven efficacy of this model.

In a handbook of this kind, there is always a balance for the authors to strike between presenting only that evidence which is clear and robust (but therefore leaving sometimes huge gaps in the story) and taking the risk of offering ‘pointers’ based on the authors’ experience and opinion. On the whole a good balance is struck here, with comprehensive coverage of the topic areas and helpful treatment protocols suggested.

With the increasing development of clinical guidelines and systematic reviews, it might be argued that some of the functions of such a handbook will eventually be supplanted. In the meantime, many clinicians will find this a useful reference work. It should certainly be considered for library purchase and some practitioners may think a personal investment worthwhile. Be warned, however: with intellectual material of this calorie content small but regular helpings are indicated – and preferably a none-too-warm reading environment. The