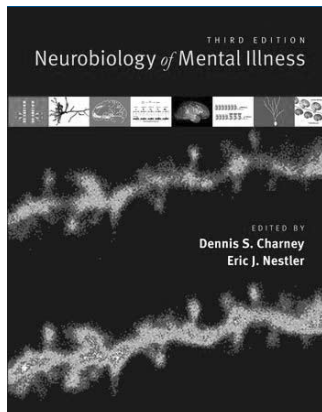


## Book reviews

Edited by Allan Beveridge, Femi Oyeboode  
and Rosalind Ramsay



### Neurobiology of Mental Illness (3rd edn)

Edited by Dennis S. Charney  
& Eric J. Nestler.  
Oxford University Press. 2011.  
£80.00 (pb). 1504 pp.  
ISBN: 9780199798261

Biology being the study of life, the neurobiology of mental illness is a broad topic of relevance to all psychiatrists. Colleagues who dismiss molecular and animal models of human ills, perhaps sniggering that we are really quite different to ‘cells’ and ‘rats’, are missing out on some inventive and often beautiful science; just as those reductionists who triumphantly state that consciousness is an illusion neglect many other productions of that organ which most interests us.

Having said that, one has to ask who reads – let alone buys – a book as intimidating as this one in scope and size? And how on earth does one review it? For this is an awesome book. Weighing in at 3.4 kg (7.5 pounds, over half a stone) even in paperback, it contains 87 (yes!) chapters written by about 200 contributors, and is more or less equally divided into sections on basic neuroscience, clinical research methods, psychosis, mood disorder, anxiety, substance misuse, dementia, child psychiatry and ‘special topic areas’. The last 65 pages or so are a rather thorough index.

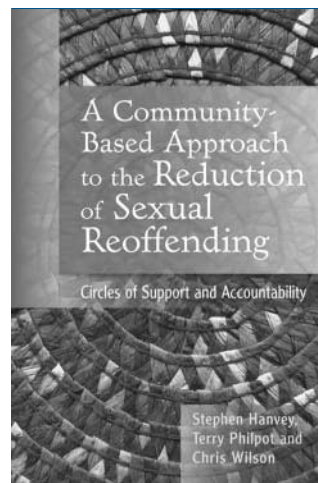
Once I felt up to my Herculean test, I wrestled with this truly magisterial tome for about 7 days using all the spare time available. Reader, you will not be surprised to learn that I did not read every one of what must be more than 100 000 words, but I swear I turned every page. I even read many chapters in full. And it was worth it! Not only do I feel virtuous, slightly ecstatic and a bit stronger, I am much better informed. Genetics, molecular biology and brain imaging get particularly thorough coverage in what are almost entirely very well-written, fairly accessible, concise summaries of hard-won neuroscientific knowledge. There are plenty of excellent clinical descriptions and therapeutics as well. Some of the chapters are wee gems – I particularly liked those on brain development, signal transduction, epigenetics, too many of the child chapters to single out, and those on the neurobiology of social attachment and resilience. I will be suggesting this book to all students and trainees up to the task of heaving it around as an unrivalled introduction to what is known about the pathophysiology of just about every type of problem we might see in psychiatric practice. It also incorporates psychosocial aspects of biology relevant to psychiatry well; certainly much better treatment than biology usually gets in psychosocial tracts.

It is therefore easy to see why this book is now in its third edition – although equally mysterious why it has taken 2 years to release the softback edition. It probably contains too much on brain scanning, particularly as we know so little about the

biology of imaging findings. I also think – a counsel of perfection this – we could do with even more synthesising and even better incorporation of the impact of the environment on neurobiology. Such changes would make the next version of what was my constant companion for a week, and should be a trusted reference resource for a while yet, if not quite a timeless friend, even better. It may even have to be a bit bigger.

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### A Community-Based Approach to the Reduction of Sexual Reoffending: Circles of Support and Accountability

By Stephen Hanvey,  
Terry Philpot & Chris Wilson.  
Jessica Kingsley Publishers. 2011.  
£19.99 (pb). 192pp.  
ISBN: 9781849051989

This book is the first UK publication on circles of support and accountability (COSA) and their development in the UK over the past decade. A circle comprises a group of volunteers – trained and supervised – who provide structured support to a child sex offender in the community, and hold him to account for his behaviour. As the book states, COSA have at their heart a philosophy of restorative justice in which all people within a community are of equal importance, with an emphasis on healthy relationships and mutual responsibility.

Chapter one sets out the history of COSA, from its inception in the early 1990s by the Canadian Mennonites (a faith-based community) to its support by Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) and the Ministry of Justice in the UK in recent years. Chapter two provides some information about child sex offenders, their characteristics and motivation, as well as some detail about treatment approaches. Chapter three touches on public attitudes towards sex offenders and current community arrangements such as MAPPA. The book truly finds its feet with chapters four and five, which provide much more detail regarding the principles of COSA, the model of care and the way in which it is delivered; detailed interviews with four ‘core members’ (child sex offenders) and four volunteers are engrossing and illuminating. Chapter six devotes itself to the question of effectiveness and evaluation, for which there is some empirical evidence, albeit somewhat constrained by small sample sizes and low base rates for reoffending in sex offenders. The book concludes – arguably, in a rather random fashion – with a discussion of the role of the media in reflecting and influencing public attitudes regarding child sex offenders.

The book explicitly targets the interested lay person as its primary audience, and in doing so, achieves an easy conversational style and a refreshing absence of jargon throughout. Certainly, the