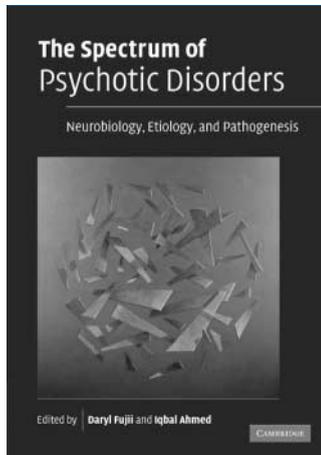


Book reviews

Edited by Sidney Crown, Femi Oyeboode
and Rosalind Ramsay



**The Spectrum
of Psychotic Disorders:
Neurobiology, Etiology
and Pathogenesis**

Edited by Daryl Fujii
and Iqbal Ahmed.
Cambridge University Press.
2007. 588pp. £80.00 (hb).
ISBN 9780521850568

There is an ever increasing and progressively more robust body of data that demonstrates the need for modern psychiatry to free itself from the historically based, descriptive categorical classifications enshrined within DSM and ICD systems and move towards alternative approaches that recognise diagnostic entities that are more likely to reflect the pathological processes underlying the illnesses experienced by our patients.

To this end, this book starts from the assumption that psychosis is a neurobiological syndrome associated with abnormal functioning of frontal systems, temporal lobes and the dopaminergic projections to these areas, and that many structural and/or functional changes in these systems can lead to psychosis. Within this framework, detailed consideration is given to psychotic illness divided according to several major domains: primary psychotic disorders (including schizophrenia, delusional disorder, etc.), mood disorders, neurodevelopmental disorders, central nervous system disorders, substance misuse and medications, neurodegenerative disorders and sensory impairments.

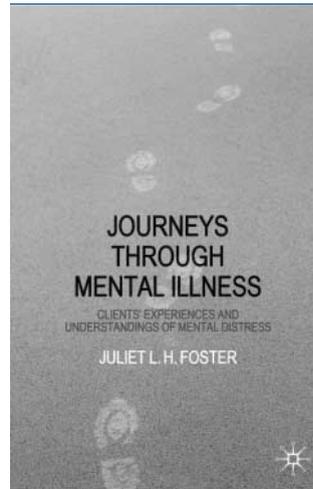
The major strength of the book is that a wide variety of clinical scenarios involving psychosis are brought together within a single volume. This helps the clinician in a practical way by providing ease of access to information as well as being helpful in moving thinking away from the rigid constraints of operational diagnostic categories. It is particularly pleasing to have 'organic' causes discussed in detail as well as the issue of psychosis in autism. The book is nicely presented and provides an accessible overview of relevant research. A nice innovation is the use of a grading system (A–D) to indicate the level of evidence for the issues discussed – although, disappointingly, this was not used to maximum advantage.

As tends to be the case with multi-author edited volumes there is more chapter to chapter variation in quality and coverage of material than is desirable. Most surprisingly there is not a simple, clear summary of the main information for each chapter.

In summary, this book provides useful information in a helpful framework that moves thinking beyond the unhelpful constraints of our current operational classifications. It is likely to be of interest to trainee and practising psychiatrists across all psychiatric sub-specialties.

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**Journeys Through
Mental Illness.
Clients' Experiences
and Understandings
of Mental Distress**

By Juliet L. H. Foster.
Palgrave. 2007. 218pp. £18.99 (pb).
ISBN 9781403986269

When I started my clinical training, following a particularly egalitarian preclinical course, I was struck by the rigid hierarchy that pervaded the wards. Surgeons were the most hierarchical, followed by physicians, with psychiatrists trailing a way behind, but not entirely free from the prevailing attitudes. As a medical student I was near the bottom of the power pyramid, but above the junior nurses and the patients, who occupied the lowest stratum. As Jim Birley pointed out in a paper in the *BMJ*, the staff members who shared the lower depths with the patients were the ward cleaners. As a result they communicated much more with the patients than did any other staff, and knew their personal stories, their fears and hopes. However, the nature of the hierarchy was such that orders flowed downwards while information flowed in the opposite direction, but did not include the emotionally valuable material patients shared with the cleaners.

Juliet Foster is a social psychologist who has conducted qualitative research on the views of clients (her term) attending two day centres and a group admitted to an acute ward. She was interested in their understanding of their own illnesses, how this differed from the formulations made by the psychiatric staff, the effect of becoming a service user on their self-image, and the process by which they came to terms with the changes in their lives. She supplemented this ethnographic material with an analysis of texts from four newsletters produced by mental health organisations for a readership of users and carers. Her aim was to give a voice to the users of our services whose views are often unsought or disregarded. She writes that:

'In the realm of academia, the voices of those who have been diagnosed with and considered to have mental health problems have been conspicuously absent'.

She interviewed over eighty service users, but the recorded quotes and reported comments do not reflect the richness and diversity I expected from a sample of this size. After an introductory chapter setting out her aims, she presents an extensive review of the literature on the attitude to people with mental illness of the public, professionals and the users themselves, the latter being scanty and justifying her research. All the usual suspects have been rounded up, and readers familiar with this field could skip this section. The next few chapters on sociological constructs and the author's method failed to grip my interest, and I was relieved when I finally arrived at the meat of the book, where the voices of users speak out. The users' recourse to humour in their characterisation of the professionals involved in their care is both surprising and amusing. The structure of the ward round or user review allows no opportunity to demonstrate their fund of irony and satire, and few professionals become aware of this counterculture. One user on the admission ward referred to a psychiatric nurse as Nurse Ratched (from *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*). When

Foster asked him which nurse he was referring to, he replied that it could have been any of the three on duty.

Foster's thesis, which the book title reflects, is that:

'Clients use their own experience to describe, define and make sense of mental health problems in general, and that their definitions also change and develop as the client's experience changes and develops, and as they interact with other individuals'.

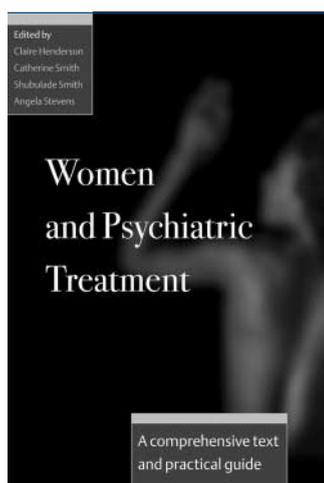
Hence her metaphor of a journey. Her conclusion is that:

'suffering from a psychosis does not negate that client's beliefs about his or her own mental health and treatment'.

I endorse this statement emphatically and urge you to read this book if you doubt it. The structure of the book is much more that of a research dissertation than a narrative, and I would have welcomed a much greater proportion spent on users' own words and reflections. However, Foster does us a service by flattening the professional hierarchy and allowing us the always enlightening, and sometimes chastening, experience of hearing what our clients think of us and our treatments.

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**Women and Psychiatric Treatment:
A Comprehensive Text
and Practical Guide**

Edited by Claire Henderson,
Catherine Smith, Shubulade Smith
& Angela Stevens. Routledge.
2006. 352pp. £39.95 (hb).
ISBN 0415213940

The editors of this book aim to provide a comprehensive text and a practical guide to psychiatric treatment for women. These aims were, in my view, only partially met, although overall this text is a useful addition to the growing literature in this field. Interest in the treatment of women with mental health problems and the specific issues that relate to those women has grown in recent years. It has been subject to considerable discussion and the Department of Health's review and documentation.

Many areas covered by this book are not only important but also enlightening. Women who use psychiatric services often have multiple and complex needs. Unfortunately, issues of gender-specific assessment, treatment and risk management have frequently been overlooked in the development of those services and as a result the specific needs presented by women are often not met.

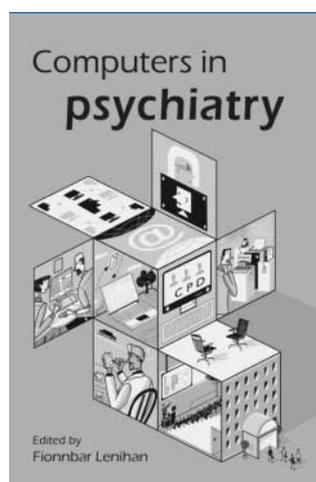
In 23 chapters, the 29 contributors cover background information, treatment settings, particular groups, specific disorders and therapies. The thought-provoking chapter on forensic settings has much to offer to those working in less secure environments. A number of the chapters covering specific disorders are thorough and informative, although this does not apply to all. Interestingly,

the section addressing the management of the sequelae of trauma covers borderline personality disorder and self-harm, although in general, the book focuses on mental illness rather than all forms of mental disorder. While some of the specific issues more frequently faced by women, such as domestic violence, are considered, other areas, for example in specific treatments, do not receive significant emphasis. As would be expected with any multi-authored book, the style and quality of writing varies and at times this becomes frustrating, particularly when referencing is poor. Some chapters provide only anecdotal accounts, while others provide excellently referenced and evaluated consideration. I believe the text would have benefited from the adoption of a more consistent approach and perhaps clearer guidance or stronger editing.

In my view, the editors have produced an important book; however, its quality would have improved if they had not attempted to cover such a wide range of topics, or conversely, if they had been more ambitious and produced a larger, more comprehensive text. *Women in Psychiatric Treatment* has something to offer to many readers, although I feel it may disappoint those with more specialist involvement in this field.

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Computers in Psychiatry

Edited by Fionnbar Lenihan.
Gaskell. 2006. 222pp. £22.50 (pb).
ISBN 19046712171

The reviewer's task is to evaluate whether the author's promise in the preface, namely, 'to provide the tools needed for effective use of computers in clinical psychiatry', is fulfilled by the book. We shall see shortly. This book is a multi-author effort, condensing 222 pages of text and illustrative diagrams into 15 orderly chapters. The reader is gently taken from the very basic material such as choosing a computer, to gradually more meaty concepts.

The initial chapters introduce the reader to basic principles such as components, different types of computers, operating systems and the main considerations in purchasing a computer. Chapters 3 to 6 offer extensive instruction in the use of the common software packages that a psychiatrist might use to support their work producing letters/reports, clinical presentations, compiling and managing databases and producing audit reports, among others. Chapters 7 and 8 deal with the use of statistical programs and organisational tools and would make helpful reading for anyone interested in research.

Chapters 10 and 11 discuss internet use and electronic communication and are detailed enough without being too