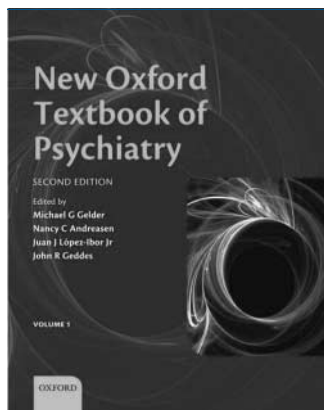


Book review

Edited by Allan Beveridge, Femi Oyeboode
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New Oxford Textbook of Psychiatry (2nd edn)

Edited by Michael Gelder,
Nancy Andreasen, Juan Lopez-Ibor
and John Geddes.
Oxford University Press. 2009.
£195.00 (hb). 2208 pp.
ISBN: 9780199206698

Anyone sticking their head round the door of a hospital mailroom these days would be forgiven for thinking that the preferred NHS provider is Amazon.com. All kinds of 'signature on delivery' items appear on a daily basis – some of them quite big. I had already trained up the receptionist with a mail order car battery, and then, to extend her knowledge and skills framework, a piano – so she was completely unfazed by the arrival of the 6.8 kg, two-volume package that is the *New Oxford Textbook of Psychiatry*. The book is especially good for descriptive statistical treatments: 2086 pages plus index; 11 sections; 269 articles; 378 authors; 28.5 cm × 22.5 cm × 10 cm – all covered with an interesting blue lacquer-like finish that peels off alarmingly on quite minimal contact with water (see below).

This is not really a textbook – it is more of a non-alphabetical encyclopaedia with very few pictures. It is certainly comprehensive, ranging from 'the patient's perspective', through the many scientific disciplines that inform psychiatry, to practical clinical information about almost any psychiatric disorder you can think of. All the subspecialties are represented, even shamanism and social work. Despite all the space to write in, the authors have still had to be selective, and they have done this skilfully, managing to convey a clear enthusiasm for their subjects. For the second edition, many authors were invited to revise their first edition efforts, and some new material has been added.

It must have been a logistical nightmare to put this together: you cannot but admire the editors' skill in delivering such a fine documentary record of the scope of our discipline around the turn of the century. On this point, it is usual when reviewing textbooks to consider the question of the internet *v.* print – as the editors do (unsurprisingly plumping for the book) in the preface. The fact is that you could get a lengthy broadband subscription for the same money, and instantly peruse regularly updated, high-quality, peer-reviewed topics (covering a wider range of opinion) in psychiatry and beyond – along with plenty of superior illustrative material. For a companion to psychiatric studies though, I have to say I think the *Shorter Oxford Textbook*¹ with internet extension is probably the better foundation.

Feeling guilty about not having the time and energy to read from cover to cover (I would need a job-planning meeting to negotiate that), I decided to field-test the thing. Trainees rarely consulted it, preferring pocket handbooks (like the excellent and sturdily bound, wipe-clean *Oxford Handbook of Psychiatry*²); undergraduates plagiarised instead stuff they could simply cut and paste for their projects; and academic colleagues were either

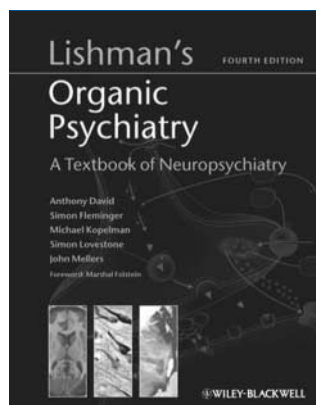
mystified as to why they would ever need a textbook, or were entirely pleased to point out their distinguished contributions to it. I had thought about putting it in the out-patient waiting area so that the clients could evaluate the efforts of their care providers, but (a) they are already using the internet for that; and (b) along with *Hello!*, it would be considered a hospital-acquired infection contamination risk and fire-hazard (no, really).

The lack of portability is a real issue. In the end, though, that is why I discovered the true value of the book. Tired of ferrying it around in the car as if it were a demanding overweight teenager, I had left my review copy in our country place on the estate, where house guests would, as evenings wore on, increasingly trip over it on the way to the malt whisky collection on the sideboard. They started to flip through it. And then they read whole articles, asked questions, started annoying debates, tried to steal it, and so on. Frankly, non-psychiatrists loved it. The book is clearly accessible, well-written and evidently lends itself to casual, serendipitous, lay reading. Thus, this textbook should not be purchased 'for the library' (as is sometimes recommended in a 'damned with faint praise' manner in these pages), but is needed altogether more urgently in the lavatory – to replace elegantly one's ageing stack of *The Field* magazine. Only the moisture resistance of the cover could be improved.

- 1 Gelder M, Harrison P, Cowen P. *Shorter Oxford Textbook of Psychiatry (5th edn)*. Oxford University Press, 2006.
- 2 Semple D, Smyth R. *Oxford Handbook of Psychiatry (2nd edn)*. Oxford University Press, 2009.

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Lishman's Organic Psychiatry: A Textbook of Neuropsychiatry

Edited by Antony David,
Simon Fleming, Michael Kopelman,
Simon Lovestone & John Mellers.
Wiley-Blackwell. 2009.
£120 (hb). 948pp.
ISBN: 9781405118606

It is impossible to overstate the influence of *Lishman's Organic Psychiatry* on British psychiatry. It has evolved through four editions over more than 30 years to become the definitive UK textbook of both neuropsychiatry and organic psychiatry. In many ways, *Lishman's* viewed as a series forms a wonderful history of 20th-century neuropsychiatry. For example, reopening the first edition reveals an incredible pool of valuable information about seminal studies from the 1950s and 1960s which are nearly impossible to find on medical databases. Yet it is also fascinating to see the gaps in knowledge that existed at that time, for example dementia with Lewy bodies, HIV/AIDS, mitochondrial disorders and channelopathies. Even more fundamentally there has been a subtle evolution of concepts and terminology through the series with decreasing emphasis on personality characteristics associated with neurological disorders and malingering but a burgeoning of supporting evidence from neuroimaging and medical genetics.