

mental health care. The reviews summarise the available evidence for specific interventions, with evidence from randomised-controlled trials considered to be the most reliable way for establishing the efficacy of all treatment (including psychological treatments).

The importance of this book is probably more as an indication that a paradigm has shifted and less as a reliable collection of reviews of the effectiveness of mental health care interventions. Methodologically, it is quite limited. Many of the reviews are written by clinical experts, but it is difficult to tell how systematic they are. Although the treatment recommendations are classified according to their level of evidence, few of the reviews include a description of the search strategies that were undertaken to identify the primary studies. The reviews tend to be narrative and there are no attempts to quantitatively review or meta-analyse individual study results when appropriate. A further problem is that although these reviews may have been reasonably recent at the time the book went to press, they are already out of date. This applies particularly to the chapters on drug treatment for Alzheimer's disease and schizophrenia, areas where there have been considerable advances of the past couple of years. Clinicians requiring up-to-date information must look elsewhere, for example in the Cochrane Library or *Evidence-Based Mental Health*. But in some ways, although clearly relevant to the clinician, these are minor quibbles. The importance and interest of this book are in the wealth of clinical expertise contained within its pages and in the fascinating political processes surrounding its production that are reflected in Seligman's extraordinary Foreword and Afterword. These attempt to forestall the misuse of the reviews by managed care organisations whose first goal is to cut

costs. Clinicians attempting to implement evidence-based practice will be familiar with these dangers, though will appreciate that they should not invalidate attempts to provide the most effective care for their patients.

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Questions of Competence. Culture, Classification and Intellectual Disability

Edited by Richard Jenkins. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1998. 250 pp. £14.95 (pb), £40.00 (hb). ISBN 0-521-62662-5

The names given to the subject matter of this book have changed many times as each comes to be regarded as pejorative. Even now the name of the faculty of the College dealing with the psychiatry which complicates limited intellectual ability differs from nomenclature used by other professions in the UK and that used by colleagues in North America. Parents, administrators and those who broadcast or produce articles in newspapers absorbed by the general public are all confused. The problems of classification and definition also reflect political and philosophical differences which have made, and continue to make, major intrusions into the lives of people who themselves are given little or no say.

The contributors in this volume are anthropologists, sociologists and educationists. The academic grounding lying behind each contribution is consistent, covering

politics, philosophy, human development and the demands and advantages of cultural background. The tone towards those who fail to live up to society's demands is gentle. Less forgiving is the polite but firm criticism of those who advocate or operate exclusion, without any attempt to understand the social context in which a person is judged to have failed as an actual or potential citizen. The field work reported brings the problems and the triumphs to life. The accounts of the societies described are full of rich relevant data, beautifully reported.

Professor Jenkins acknowledges the giant in this field of the social anthropology of disability – Robert Edgerton's book *The Cloak of Competence*, published in 1967, which inspired much of the research leading up to the publication of the present volume. It is sincerely hoped that that is a book that is in every departmental library, showing the signs of 30 years of hard use. There are many more extensive books and some more strictly academic. Yet here is a collection of essays with evidence of the rich humanity of those often dismissed, excluded or even denied the right to live in the societies in which they were born.

Questions of Competence has earned a place near *The Cloak of Competence*. It should be read by all junior psychiatrists and by the more senior who sometimes give the impression that intellectual disability marks a different species and hence is no business of theirs.

Edgerton, R. B. (1967) *The Cloak of Competence*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

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