

## Book reviews

EDITED BY SIDNEY CROWN and ALAN LEE

### Neurobiology in the Treatment of Eating Disorders

Edited by Hans W. Hoek, Janet L. Treasure and Melanie A. Katzman. Chichester: Wiley. 1998. 529 pp. £95.00 (hb). ISBN 0-471-98102-8

The stated aims of this book are first, to integrate advances in biological sciences with aetiological concepts and second, to incorporate these data into therapeutic practice. The first aim is amply fulfilled. The relevant areas of neurobiology include the genetics of eating disorders, models of eating disturbances in animals (e.g. thin sow syndrome), the hypothalamic hypothesis of weight control and, in considerable detail, neurochemical models of anorexia and bulimia nervosa.

In some ways this book does not meet the second aim. The authors explain their difficulties according to each disorder. In anorexia nervosa refeeding and weight restoration are important to correct the effects of prolonged starvation which otherwise lengthen the course of the illness, but pharmacotherapy has little to offer. Neurobiological research has led to new drug treatments in bulimia nervosa, but the benefits are modest even in the short-term and are poorly sustained in the long-term. In binge eating disorder few biological correlates of overeating have been identified. In truth, therapeutic advances have been derived chiefly from clinical observations and the empirical use of controlled treatment trials. Nevertheless, the several chapters on the treatment of eating disorders are thorough and useful, covering appraisals of a wide range of psychological and drug treatments, numerous in bulimia nervosa but scarce in anorexia nervosa.

The central section of the text is concerned with the contributions of neurobiology to the aetiology and pathogenesis of the eating disorders. We learn that an earlier acceptance of a strong hereditary component of anorexia nervosa, based on studies of twins referred to hospital clinics, may need revision. In view of selection biases population-based studies might be preferable. It is perhaps disconcerting that a

twin study in Virginia, USA, failed to confirm the heritability of anorexia nervosa. On the other hand, an ongoing twin study in Denmark is confirming a higher rate of concordance in monozygotic than dizygotic twin pairs even in unselected samples.

The review of the hypothalamic hypothesis begins with the early experimental lesions of the dorsolateral nuclei in rats leading them to die from starvation, and proceeds to the wealth of studies on the role of neurotransmitters in weight regulation. The theory of hypothalamic control of eating and weight remains unproven but has been useful in stimulating relevant research in the human eating disorders. The role of neurotransmitters remains controversial. More recently the lipostatic hypothesis has gained support from animal studies with the discovery of the defective Ob gene in a strain of obese mice. This gene has an encoded hormonal product, leptin, secreted into the circulation in proportion to the body's adiposity. When leptin is deficient, obesity may ensue. It is hoped that these discoveries will lead to a greater understanding of energy intake and utilisation. In a chapter on neuroimaging techniques structural and functional abnormalities are described in anorexia nervosa but they are probably secondary to the malnutrition. A similar dilemma applies to changes in regional cerebral blood flow which have been described in these patients, but a primary underlying neurological abnormality has been proposed by the investigators who have undertaken this research in children with anorexia.

The remainder of the book is aimed at completing the overview of eating disorders by including chapters on the aetiology of anorexia and bulimia nervosa and drawing on epidemiological, behavioural and phenomenological data. Thus, the stated aim of the editors and most authors is accomplished, namely to adopt a multi-dimensional perspective. Without exception the chapters, written by internationally known experts, are thoughtful and informative. The most useful chapters are those achieving comprehensive reviews, for example, the assembly of all the psycho-

logical and treatment trials in bulimia nervosa up to 1998. Equally impressive is an exhaustive compendium of methods of assessing physical and psychological changes in patients with eating disorders, listing a huge number of self-report measures and structured interviews, even though the authors seem to regard these tools as more useful than the clinical interview in reaching a diagnosis.

The editors encouraged the authors to place their personal stamp on each chapter, but in doing so were sometimes too permissive. Adjoining chapters bear headings which betray an ambivalence with spelling: 'Etiology of Anorexia Nervosa' and 'Aetiology of Bulimia Nervosa'. The chapter on epidemiology concludes mistakenly that there is no convincing evidence that eating disorders in general are on the rise, when the authors mean anorexia nervosa in which the increase is confined to females aged 15-24 years over the past 50 years. Indeed, the rise in bulimia nervosa is accepted. Whereas there is a general enthusiasm for the multidimensional approach to aetiology one author states that it is more useful to hide our ignorance than reveal our knowledge. There is also an Australian proclivity for replacing the term eating disorders with 'dieting disorders'.

The main value of this book is its large bibliography concentrating on the research of the past 20 years. It should be read by everyone with a specialised interest in eating disorders and should be placed in all departmental libraries.

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**Professor G. Russell** Emeritus Professor of Psychiatry and Consultant Psychiatrist, Hayes Grove Priory Hospital, Prestons Road, Hayes, Kent BR2 7AS

### A Guide to Treatments That Work

Edited by Peter E. Nathan and Jack M. Gorman. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1998. 624 pp. £55.00 (hb). ISBN 0-19-510227-4

The aim of this book is succinctly stated by the title. It consists of a series of reviews of pharmacological and psychosocial treatments of a wide range of mental disorders. As it marks an acceptance that the treatment of mental health problems should be based on the best available research evidence, this book may become a landmark in the development of evidence-based

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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**John Geddes** Senior Clinical Research Fellow and Honorary Consultant Psychiatrist, University of Oxford, Department of Psychiatry, Warneford Hospital, Oxford OX3 7JX

### **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.

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

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**Ann Gath** Wellcome Unit of the History of Medicine, University of East Anglia, Jasmine Cottage, The Green, Tostock, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk IP30 9NY