

## Book reviews

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### International Perspectives on Mental Health

Edited by Hamid Ghodse.  
RCPsych Publications. 2011.  
£40.00 (hb). 512pp.  
ISBN: 9781908020000

A formal compendium of statistics about mental health services, teaching and research in countries across the globe would be a useful resource for researchers in public mental health, and is to some extent provided by publications from the World Health Organization, such as its *Mental Health Atlas*. An informal compilation of perspectives on psychiatry in different countries might be useful for clinicians looking for key contacts or planning their travels, and can to some extent be provided by a good internet search.

Ghodse's volume comprises articles commissioned for the journal *International Psychiatry*, and falls somewhere between a formal atlas and more informal internet sources. Articles are often written by senior figures in the field (and in some cases by the only psychiatrist in a particular country), and many provide insightful perspectives that might be otherwise hard for readers to come by. I read the contributions from Africa with particular interest, and picked up a range of ideas and facts that I had been unaware of.

At the same time, there is a good deal of variation in the approach taken by different contributors to this volume, perhaps reflecting in part the variation in mental health services across the world, and certain regions receive particularly short shift (there is no contribution from China, and only 18 countries from Africa and South America are included). The idiosyncratically interesting facts from one country might be somewhat irritating to a reader who is hoping to carefully compare services, teaching and research across countries.

This collection of pieces raises important questions about the optimal mental health policies, service provision, training schemes and research agendas for advancing psychiatry across the globe. Concluding chapters, perhaps for each major geographic region, or for the volume as a whole, outlining the alternative approaches that have been taken and their advantages and disadvantages, would have been welcome. It seems timely to summarise and integrate the growing theoretical and empirical literature on strategies for enhancing public mental health.

Overall, I think Ghodse and his contributors have done the field a service through this compilation. Readers interested in psychiatry in different parts of the globe will, however, benefit by also consulting a range of other formal and informal sources.

Writers interested in providing comprehensive approaches to global mental health may be inspired by the country vignettes offered here to move forward with such projects.

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### The Moon and Madness

By Niall McCrae.  
Imprint Academic. 2011.  
£17.95 (pb). 250pp.  
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This is a wide-ranging book. Although the focus is on the purported relationship between mental illness and the lunar cycle, it touches on much more. The richness and breadth of sources of this disquisition is both the strength and weakness of this book. From the ancient Greeks to our day, there has been fascination with the possibility that the Moon is capable of influencing mood, behaviour, diseases such as epilepsy, and mental illness. By the 19th century, Leuret and Moreau, working in France, had conclusively demonstrated that the lunar cycle had no role in or influence on seizure frequency in epilepsy. Despite numerous investigations yielding the same result for mental illness, there remains reluctance to accept this conclusion.

McCrae traces the origins of the belief that the Moon can exact influence on mental states and behaviour. His exploration of the history travels through both Western and Middle Eastern antiquity onwards to medieval Europe and then to our own times. Even though the overt interest is in the nature of lunar influence, there are diversions into the history of ideas in general, the history of science and of psychiatry. The narrative thrust of the book often moves without much announcement from one subject to another, for example from the *Malleus Maleficarum* to astrology and back to lunar cycles. No doubt, the excursions are learned and the writing is elegant. Yet, there is a patent lack of focus.

Chapter 5 deals with the modern psychiatric literature. It is unclear how comprehensive the review of the literature is. This was the author's opportunity to address his chosen subject with vigour, rigour and exactitude. However, it was a disappointing chapter, as it dealt with the issues in a superficial manner, substituting the use of tables for a critical overview of the material to hand. What was needed was a forensic analysis of the literature. Unfortunately, this was not forthcoming. The book might as well have ended with the quotation, 'Just as we cannot prove that werewolves, unicorns and other interesting creatures do not exist, we cannot prove that the Moon does not influence behaviour' (p. 108, uncorrected proof), rather than continuing for another three chapters.