

Book reviews

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Handbook of Female Psychopharmacology

Edited by Meir Steiner & Gideon Koren.
London: Martin Dunitz. 2003. 177 pp.
£26.95 (hb). ISBN 1 84184 2717

Handbook of Female Psychopharmacology is described as a resource for psychiatrists, family physicians, obstetricians and gynaecologists, nurse practitioners and pharmacists, and aims to raise awareness of gender differences in the aetiology, presentation, prevention and treatment of mental disorders in women. Eleven chapters cover all the major psychotropic drug groups (anti-depressants, mood stabilisers, anxiolytics and antipsychotics) and interactions with oral contraceptives, and then address the treatment of specific disorders or situations: premenstrual dysphoric disorder, depression in pregnancy, antidepressants and breast-feeding, mood disorders in menopausal women, 'nature's own medicine' and substance misuse in women. The chapter on herbal remedies covers only the four most commonly prescribed herbs, whereas in reality women use a much wider range of herbal medicines. In the substance misuse chapter, alcohol detoxification during pregnancy or labour is dealt with in two short sentences and there is no mention of acamprosate. There is also nothing to assist the clinician treating underweight, malnourished women with eating disorders whose pharmacokinetics must be very different, and eating disorders are often comorbid with many of the conditions described in this text. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many clinicians still rely on asking a colleague when they are uncertain about treating pregnant or lactating women but unless that colleague is particularly well versed in this area of work they might better consult this book. However, inevitably, some sections will quickly become

out of date in this rapidly changing field. It will always be worth checking the journal literature for more up-to-date information.

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Catatonia: A Clinician's Guide to Diagnosis and Treatment

By Max Fink & Michael Alan Taylor,
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
2003. 256 pp. £50 (hb). ISBN 0 521 82226 2

Catatonia – although regarded by many as merely of historical interest – is still instantly recognisable, and is associated with many different neurological and psychiatric disorders. It can be found in as many as one in ten acutely ill patients in psychiatric

units. Effective treatment can be life-saving, and allows treatment of associated psychiatric disorders. This book is the best current account of the phenomenology and treatment of catatonia, and is written by two acknowledged experts in the field.

Catatonia was first described by Kahlbaum in 1874 in patients with diverse psychiatric and general medical conditions, and it was quickly incorporated into the concept of dementia praecox and schizophrenia by Kraepelin and Bleuler. In the first half of the 20th century, catatonia was interpreted in psychological terms by Anglo-American authors, ignoring the neurological interpretations of French and European authors. With this went a general lack of interest in the condition. Interest was renewed in the 1970s, with studies such as those of one of the authors, showing that catatonia was more common in mood disorders than in schizophrenia, together with the effectiveness of treatment with electroconvulsive therapy.

The authors discuss the different signs of catatonia, such as mutism, stupor and excitement. More than 50 patient vignettes are given, making these features and their treatment easier to relate to everyday practice. The different neurological and psychiatric conditions associated with catatonia are discussed, as is the differential diagnosis for individual catatonic signs, together with investigation and treatment of the condition. The neuroleptic malignant syndrome, which is indistinguishable from malignant catatonia, is well described.

The book provides an extensive discussion of the classification of catatonia (reflecting the current unsatisfactory basis of its DSM and ICD classifications) and its management, which is also often unsatisfactory, even though the condition can be effectively and rapidly relieved. The pathophysiology of catatonia is reviewed, but remains a mystery. As well as being an excellent account of catatonia for clinicians, this book may inspire interest in its pathophysiology and lead to this mystery soon being only of historical interest.

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