
This book discusses an attempt to devise a mental health programme for the community by training physicians and ministers in the use of standardized questionnaires. The difficulties in assessing its success are frankly examined, but few specific improvements for the future are suggested in this study. This book may interest those intending to embark themselves on a community mental health programme, but few more general conclusions emerge.


Psychiatrists have never been happy about diagnosis. They have not been able to agree on the principles of classification or on the clinical application of these principles; individuals have not been consistent in diagnosing a given patient's condition on different occasions; and the diagnoses made of the same patient by different psychiatrists may vary considerably. The disadvantage of this state of affairs is obvious, especially when choice of treatment or comparisons of prevalence and incidence are in question. For epidemiological research such comparisons are of cardinal importance. To remedy this situation in part, an international enterprise was launched by the World Health Organization. In the initial study experienced psychiatrists from nine countries were shown six case histories and nine video-taped psychiatric interviews; they were asked to diagnose the conditions demonstrated and to fill out a relevant questionnaire.

The analysis of the findings in this promising exercise, which was carried out in London, is described in this informative report. Divergencies in diagnosis could be traced to three main sources: variation in observations of clinical features, in the inferences drawn from them, and in the nosological frame of reference. There are also valuable indications of how bias can influence diagnosis, and what statistical and classificatory lessons can be learnt from the exercise.

This was not an isolated study, but the first in a planned series of investigations, to last 10 years. The aims are to standardize diagnosis of the common psychiatric disorders by means of annual meetings in different centres, at which the methods described in this monograph will be used; and to make comparative studies, which would begin with the identification and continuous study of schizophrenia in eight countries with widely different socio-cultural attributes. This part of the plan is also well under way.

AUBREY LEWIS

BOOKS RECEIVED

(Books noticed here may also be reviewed in a later issue)


ACADEMY OF APHASIA

The Academy will hold an annual scientific meeting in Boston, 29, 30 September 1969. Details may be obtained from Dr. Otfrid Spreen, Secretary, Academy of Aphasia, Department of Psychology, University of Victoria, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. Information about a pre-conference workshop on 27, 28 September may be obtained from Dr. Frank Benson, Aphasia Unit, VA Hospital, 150 S. Huntington Avenue, Boston, Massachusetts 02130.

CORRECTION

The volume number of Progress in Neurology and Psychiatry, reviewed on p. 167 (April 1969) should be 22 at 180s., not 27 at 108s. as stated.