
Forensic psychiatry lends an added dimension to the field of psychiatry by placing the mentally disturbed person and his behaviour into a social context. The specialty attracts a lot of interest, and almost unbounded fascination in the abnormal and extreme behaviour that mental illness can lead to. How this behaviour is viewed and dealt with by the legal system is its added attraction for some. For me, however, the legal side takes a back seat and consequently issues such as comparative surveys of medical-legal systems leave me turning the pages rapidly. Tasting and fundamental questions that general textbooks of psychiatry studiously seem to omit, and that only child psychiatry occasionally touches upon is the area where forensic psychiatry is most interesting. It is the study of how the psychological development of the person may lead to antisocial behaviour and what treatments apart from incarceration we can offer. This book, naturally, deals with these topics well and has chapters on the personality disorders, addictions and dependencies and on mental illness in general and its relationship to crime of all types. There are chapters that one can read just by reading the title of the paper implied in the title: “The psychosocial milieu of the offender”, “Deception, self-deception and dissociation”, “Victims and survivors” and “Ninety-five percent of crime”. There are also topics that are of interest to all managing psychiatric patients, and which are often not written about in general textbooks. The chapter on dangerousness deals with assessment both at presentation and at discharge, and the chapter on managing violence must be of interest to everyone in acute psychiatry.

It transpires that 95% of crime is associated either with summary motoring offences, theft and handling and summary non-motoring offences. Psychiatricists on the other hand will deal with violent, sexual and drug offences which account for approximately 5% of recognized criminal behaviour. Within this group forensic psychiatry tries to understand and explain the relationship between offending and the mentally ill person. In much of our work and especially in forensic psychiatry we deal with descriptions and predictions of behaviour. When considering behaviour, psychopaths often do not make a distinction between explanation (a concept which is based on understanding) and description (which is little more than pattern recognition).

This book to some extent continues this tradition and in the preface the authors describe the book as a practical guide to the psychiatry of mentally abnormal offenders and other victims, and certainly the book feels and reads like a guide for the practitioners of forensic psychiatry and less of an academic work exploring difficult ideas.

Having shown my unbridled enthusiasm for forensic psychiatry I must state a reservation about this book, it is written by a committee. Altogether 51 contributors are cited and each chapter is written by a number of authors who are acknowledged. It is clear that the chapter is then edited by the two book authors to maintain a consistent attitude and also perhaps to minimize repetition. My experience of this type of writing by many authors is that it is often difficult to extract what is important. Each author will have his own story to tell and depending on the subject allocated to him will do it as compellingly as he can. In this respect a common feature of multi-author books. Luckily these authors/editors have not fallen into this trap and by their strict and perhaps ruthless editing have maintained a sense of proportion. It is a book I wish I had read earlier in my psychiatric career, as forensic psychiatry certainly deals with the more esoteric and perhaps more interesting aspects of aberrant behaviour, mental illness and its social consequences.

All general psychiatrists should have a book like this on their shelves, preferably well read, and because the choice in this field is limited, why not choose this one? Reflecting on the topics in this book will make us all better at understanding the offending patient and his victim and how society is prepared to deal with them.

I had in the past been fond of Russian novels, so the 1151 pages of Gunn and Taylor’s book did not intimidate me. At £125, its a large book, but to me it is less than my three novels in the Crime and Punishment. It perhaps throws no more light on understanding the offender’s mind than the novel but is a good and comprehensive handbook, which is after all what it sets out to be.

MICHAEL MAIER


This is the 5th edition of a highly successful textbook, the first edition of which was published in 1964 in response to a 1961 editorial in the Lancet commenting on the delay in diagnosis and treatment of conditions requiring neurosurgery. Its intention was to "dispel the mystery" to those not directly involved in the specialty and explain the principles of diagnosis and treatment of common conditions. It also deals with endovascular techniques, a field which has made immense progress in recent years leading to an upsurge in interest in neurosurgery. The book covers the role of the neurosurgeon in the treatment of brain, spinal, and cranial abnormalities, with a strong emphasis on the use of modern imaging techniques. It is an authoritative and comprehensive guide to the principles and practice of neurosurgery.


Textbook writers must avoid being either obscure or banal although it is often possible to achieve both at once. Consequently, an insufficiently utilised assessment procedure is that of real life observation; or "In addition, more employment is associated with greater levels of neuropsychological impairment". In textbooks, the quest for comprehensiveness easily leads to vacuous remarks. Readers (especially reviewers) could well be spared, for example: "Like penetrating missile injuries, non-missile injury to the brain is also a feature common to many victims"; or "Declarative of memory has its greatest development in man". Such statements are, if anything, even more irksome when supported by references. This multi-author textbook lacks consistency in its approach: even its title is ambiguous, since in most (but not all) references to brain injury, traumatic head injury is discussed. Some conclusions are apparently intended to provide comprehensive background scientific information. One such is a chapter on the pathology of traumatic brain injury which is quite lucid and comprehensively written but is quite selective in its approach, and fails to highlight the distinction between primary and secondary brain injuries.