

BOOK REVIEWS

All titles reviewed here are available from the BMJ Bookshop, PO Box 295, London WC1H 9TE. Prices include postage in the United Kingdom and for members of the British Forces Overseas, but overseas customers should add £2 per item for postage and packing. Payment can be made by cheque in sterling drawn on a United Kingdom bank, or by credit card (Mastercard, Visa or American Express) stating card number, expiry date, and your full name.

Forensic Psychiatry: Clinical, Legal and Ethical Issues. Editors: J GUNN and PJ TAYLOR. Publisher: Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford 1993. (Pp 1151; £125.00). ISBN 0-7506-0349-6.

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 speciality also attracts a strange, and almost universal, 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 medico-legal systems leave me turning the pages rapidly. The interesting 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 is compelled to read just because of the promise 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 assessments 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. Psychiatrists 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, psychiatrists 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 more 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 with books written 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 possible. This loss of perspective is a common feature of multi-author books. Luckily these author/editors have not fallen into this trap and by their strict, and perhaps ruthless editing have maintained a sense of proportion. This 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, it's a lot more expensive than my copy of *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

An Introduction to Neurosurgery. Edited by BRYAN JENNETT and KENNETH W LINDSAY. (Pp 328, £35.00). 1994. Publisher: Butterworth Heinemann, Oxford. ISBN 0-7506-1580-X.

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 speciality and explain the principles of diagnosis and treatment of conditions in neurosurgery practice, thus addressing the issues discussed in the editorial. The 4th edition was published in 1983 since which time significant

changes have occurred in the practice of neurosurgery. Advances in neuroradiology have had an enormous impact, new operating tools and techniques are being employed and new treatment alternatives, such as radiosurgery and endovascular techniques need to be considered when making clinical management decisions. These, and many others have been incorporated in this new edition, as well as the updating of illustrations, figures and references given in the 'further reading' sections at the conclusion of each chapter.

The authors did not intend to provide a comprehensive text with intricate surgical detail, but have provided the reader with principles of assessment, diagnosis and management of the majority of conditions encountered in neurosurgical practice. There remains an important emphasis on the clinical assessment of patients against the recent advances in diagnostic neuroradiology. The text is divided into sections devoted to the major topics of head injuries, tumours, spinal lesions, congenital conditions and functional and stereotactic neurosurgery. The management of hydrocephalus is included under the 'congenital conditions' section which I think underscores the importance and frequency with which this condition (Congenital or acquired) or the complications of its treatment are seen in neurosurgical practice and suggest it may warrant 'major topic' status.

This book remains the leader in its intended market, providing a comprehensive introduction to the practice of neurosurgery to all those in the broader medical community and allied fields. It also provides an excellent introduction for those considering or beginning a career in neurosurgery.

ERIC GUAZZO

Brain Injury Rehabilitation—Clinical Considerations. Edited by M ALAN, J FINLAYSON, and SCOTT H GARNER. Publishers: Waverly Europe Ltd, London 1994. (Pp 437 £63.00). ISBN 0-683-03224-0.

Textbook writers must avoid being either obscure or banal although it is often possible to be both at once, for example: "An insufficiently utilised assessment procedure is that of real life observation"; or "In addition, more unemployment 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 modern society"; 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 implied. Some chapters are apparently intended to provide compendious background scientific information. One such is a chapter on the pathobiology of traumatic brain injury, which has a very large bibliography but is quite selective in its approach, and fails to highlight the distinction between primary and secondary brain