

Reviews

Teaching Psychiatry: Putting Theory into Practice

Linda Gask, Bulent Coskun & David Baron (eds)
Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, £49.99 hb, 278 pp.
ISBN 9780470683217

The teaching of psychiatry, in the UK at least, is facing more recognition, with the establishment of the Undergraduate Education Leads Forum at the Royal College of Psychiatrists and the introduction of chairs in psychiatry and education at several medical schools. Robust teaching throughout undergraduate and postgraduate training does not only benefit patients, but acts as a splint for the fractured identity of the specialty, and is also one of the most obvious ways to tackle recruitment crisis.

This book is an ambitious international project, with 19 chapters written by 27 authors from the English Midlands to Morocco. As might be expected, the quality of the contributions is variable. Some are lucid, with case studies and summary learning points, as in chapter 2 on student selection and chapter 4 on the development of the undergraduate core curriculum in the UK. Some are enthusiastic and engaging, for example chapter 11, an introduction to research for trainees. Other chapters, such as chapter 16 on the use of technology and chapter 17 on assessment, are succinct and useful for the academic clinician.

Yet other chapters are less successful. Chapter 3, on the ethical aspects of teaching psychiatry, is short of definitions and references and contains too many glib generalities. Chapter 15 describes in considerable detail a local development of a patient involvement programme which probably has limited applicability. I would have liked to have seen more specific mention of teaching the mental state exam in chapter 8 on interviewing skills, and more reference to classic texts in chapter 9 on teaching psychotherapy rather than citations to the author's own work.

The book ends with a diligent and systematic chapter on the importance of the psychiatrist educator, which could have been enhanced by introducing the readership to the academic portfolio and maybe by mentioning the importance of educational research in our subject.

Teaching Psychiatry could have benefited from more attentive editorial control and an emphasis on greater depth rather than diversity. Nevertheless, it is a progressive and valuable work. It will be rewarding reading for any psychiatrist interested in education and required reading for medical school psychiatry leads. It reminds us that ours is a unique specialty, rooted, as the authors of chapter 7 point out, in the 'scientific, intellectual and humanistic traditions'. International educational ventures of this kind are to be celebrated.

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Best of Five MCQs for MRCPsych Papers 1, 2 and 3 Pack

Oxford Specialty Training: Revision Texts

Lena Palaniyappan & Rajeev Krishnadas
Oxford University Press, 2010, £59.95 pb, 960 pp.
ISBN 9780199553624

The Royal College of Psychiatrists has radically broadened the psychiatry training curriculum with the introduction of the MRCPsych Papers 1, 2 and 3 in 2008. The newness of the curriculum hangs like the sword of Damocles over the trainee's head as there is no stable question bank at present; new themes and questions keep emerging with each passing diet of the examination. This relative novelty of the curriculum makes the preparation for the exams more strenuous and formidable for the trainees. The book series by Lena Palaniyappan and Rajeev Krishnadas is therefore a welcome addition to the growing number of revision resources for trainees.

The series comprises three books, one each for Paper 1, 2 and 3. Each book is divided into several chapters that closely mirror the College's curricula for individual examinations. The number of questions in each chapter is variable, with more emphasis on important topics such as core psychiatry and basic statistics. The layout of the books is easy to navigate but a bigger font and better spacing, especially in the explanation sections, would have made the text much more readable. Intermittent use of red font in Paper 2 book may cause some difficulty for readers.

Lena Palaniyappan has wide experience in teaching and training trainees for preparation of the MRCPsych examinations. He has made good use of his knowledge in compiling this series. The authors have actively endeavoured to cover a wide range of topics. The questions are comprehensive and cover both common and uncommon topics. Their format and standard match those of the College's sample questions and each is followed by a terse yet accurate explanation of the correct answer; the answers are well referenced. Slight over-reliance on a selection of textbooks, particularly one American textbook, may have some implications due to the differences between American and British diagnostic criteria and treatment strategies.

In conclusion, this series is a valuable resource for supplementing knowledge much needed to pass the MRCPsych examination.

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