

notion that making a diagnosis is a neutral procedure. They point out that, even in the supposedly unproblematic world of the 'hard' sciences, such as physics, it is accepted that the observer influences what is observed. In the diagnostic interview, the values and preconceptions of the doctor shape the final assessment of the patient. The book also examines such topics as autism and how we can have knowledge of the minds of others. It looks at schizophrenia in the context of philosophical notions of personal identity, and it considers depression and the role of individual responsibility.

Throughout the volume, the authors are at pains to emphasise that they are not offering a grand unifying theory or a definitive answer to the human predicament. Instead they seek to highlight the unresolved questions in modern-day psychiatry in the hope that readers decide for themselves what should be done. The book is aimed at those who have no prior knowledge of philosophy and it takes them, in a series of steps, from the foothills of apparently mundane clinical conundrums to the very pinnacles of contemporary philosophical concerns. Along the way it provides extensive references to the relevant literature and also sketches of the major philosophers and debates that have informed Western philosophy over the preceding centuries.

The book is heavily influenced by Anglo-American analytic philosophy and gives much less space to Continental thinkers in the existential tradition, such as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Sartre. This is disappointing, as their writings seem much livelier and passionate than the dry tomes of many analytic philosophers. Further, there is no reference to those writers, such as Dostoyevsky, Proust and Camus, who have a strong philosophical aspect to their work. But these are minor reservations. On the whole, this is a hugely ambitious and wide-ranging enterprise. The authors acknowledge that the last word on philosophy is unlikely ever to be written, because it is an evolving and dynamic discipline. However, this textbook is destined to become the standard work in its field for some time to come.

Allan Beveridge Queen Margaret Hospital, Whitefield Road, Dunfermline, Fife K12 OSU, UK. Email: allan.beveridge@faht.scot.nhs.uk

doi: 10.1192/bjp.bp.107.039495



Psychiatric Interviewing and Assessment

By Rob Poole & Robert Higgs.
Cambridge University Press.
2006. 238pp. £30.99(pb).
ISBN 9780521671194

This book needs to be considered as recommended reading for all doctors in training in psychiatry. It grasps many nettles and provides a rare insight into contemporary psychiatric practice.

Not only does this book provide a grounding in basic history-taking and mental state examination, but it also tackles the more challenging and enjoyable aspects of our work, such as community mental health team functioning, managing relationships, dealing with substance misuse, difficulties relating to psychosis, interactions with families, as well as wider issues of culture and beliefs. It provides illuminating and thought-provoking insights into self-awareness and the issues we as practitioners bring into the therapeutic relationship.

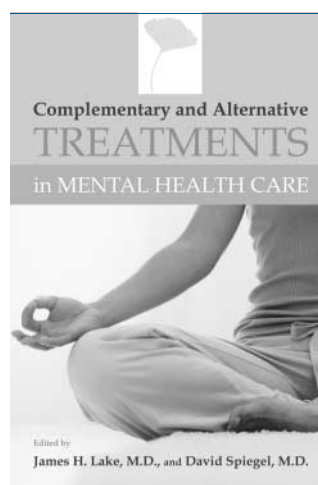
These issues are captured succinctly by well-chosen clinical scenarios. The text is easily digested and readable, with summary points at the end of each chapter which help to make what can be enormous issues distilled and clear.

A persistent theme is the depth of clinical experience evident in the authors, which is neither lofty nor manifest as unattainable ideals. This book is disarmingly applicable and approachable. What appears as deceptively simple, however, is only possible through considerable familiarity with the subject matter, which is consistently evident here.

This book brings together disparate elements of today's psychiatric practice and provides a real starting point for trainees. For this reason, it is an unsurpassed and important work.

John Michael Clifford North East Wales NHS Trust, Wrexham II11 1DU, North Wales, UK. Email: john.clifford@new-tr.wales.nhs.uk

doi: 10.1192/bjp.bp.107.037432



Complementary and Alternative Treatments in Mental Health Care

Edited by James H. Lake & David Spiegel.
American Psychiatric Publishing.
2007. 478pp. US\$56.00 (pb).
ISBN 1585622028

Complementary or alternative therapies are becoming increasingly popular with patients, yet doctors and other conventional healthcare practitioners may be slow to catch up with this trend. Lake & Spiegel have edited this fascinating book which tries to narrow the philosophical gap between the disease- and symptom-oriented Western medical approach and a holistic approach to mental health rooted mainly, but not exclusively, in Eastern tradition. The combination of an evidence-based approach with a philosophical and historical perspective conveys an argument for truly integrative mental healthcare that may even convince the toughest conventional and alternative hardliners. For instance, if homoeopathy and its resort to particle physics remains counter-intuitive and unacceptable to most scientific minds, it is important to remember that it was born from the observation that many then contemporary conventional treatments were not only ineffective but often unkind

and at times draconian. This not only strikes a chord with psychiatry's turbulent history but also with the increasing realisation in modern psychiatric practice that side-effect reduction and physical well-being must be an integral part of mental healthcare.

For me, the section on spirituality, meditation and mind–body practices was particularly impressive. As pointed out in the book, some of these techniques have already been successfully integrated into conventional psychiatric treatments such as dialectical behaviour therapy. In everyday life, experience of religion and spirituality remain powerful motivating forces for human perception and behaviour so that treatment approaches that ignore this fundamental determinant of the human condition may be obviously limited. Also, this section is relevant for those clinicians who practise psychiatry in transcultural settings.

Most importantly, the authors do not endorse clinical risk-taking and throughout the book there are ample warnings about unproven and potentially unsafe practices. These warnings are put into an appropriate medico-legal context and may help clinicians to reflect about their own regulatory frameworks when practising integrative medicine. As shown in this book, evidence

for the effectiveness and safety of complementary treatments must be meticulously collated. However, relying on empirical evidence of 'what is known' in the face of a frequent lack of proof of principle 'of what is understood',¹ means that the evidence presented in this book must be complemented by updated evidence from reliable internet sources such as Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database (www.naturalmedicines.com) in view of the rapidly expanding research in this field.

This book gives an expertly written and concise introduction to a range of complementary and alternative treatments in mental health and may serve as a truly inspirational guide to anybody wishing to expand the boundaries of conventional psychiatric practice.

1 Deutsch D. *The Fabric of Reality*. Penguin, 1997.

Ursula Werneke Vrinnevi Hospital, Department of Psychiatry, 60182 Norrköping, Sweden. Email: Ursula.werneke@lio.se

doi: 10.1192/bjp.bp.107.037762