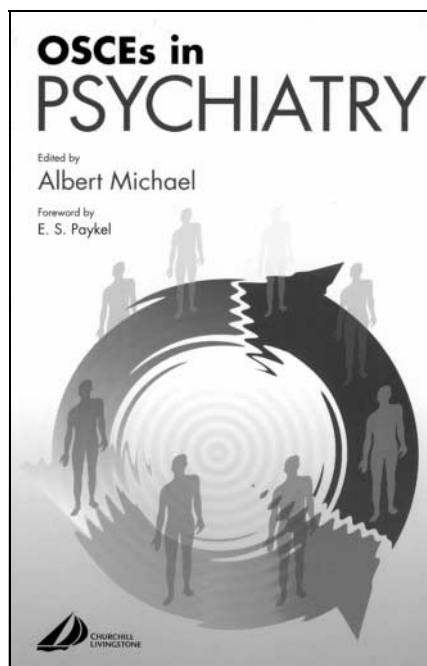


## Book reviews

EDITED BY SIDNEY CROWN, FEMI OYEBODE and ROSALIND RAMSAY

### OSCEs in Psychiatry

Edited by Albert Michael. Oxford: Churchill Livingstone. 2004. 228 pp. £19.99 (pb).



The Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE), in which candidates go through a series of 'stations', each testing a range of clinical, communication and practical skills, has been in use in medical examinations for over 40 years. The Royal College of Psychiatrists last year incorporated the OSCE into the MRCPsych Part I Examination, replacing the traditional 'long case'. The utility, reliability and validity of OSCEs in testing undergraduates in psychiatry are well established.

This book is intended to help candidates preparing for the MRCPsych Part I Examination. It contains 60 OSCE stations in psychiatry. Each station follows a similar format: a construct, instructions to the candidate and a checklist – all presented in an easy-to-read 'bullets and boxes' style. Examples of suggested questions (often verbatim) and some theoretical discussion of the topic should help sustain the reader's interest. The stations discussed present the

right mix of various psychiatric subspecialties and cover a wide range of situations intended to test the candidate's clinical, communication and practical skills.

From the trainee's perspective, the introductory chapter is particularly important, as it gives practical tips on how to prepare for the OSCE. The 'how to fail an OSCE' section in the same chapter also demands careful reading. This book can be used by trainers who themselves may not be familiar with OSCEs, and some examples can be incorporated into clinical 'mock examination' scenarios. The timing of the publication is excellent, given the recent inclusion of an OSCE in the MRCPsych Part I Examination and the current gap in the market.

My only criticism is that the editor has probably been over-ambitious in stating that the book is also aimed at 'medical students, postgraduates and practitioners in other clinical specialties'. There are similar OSCE guides in other medical specialties and hence the impact of this book beyond its remit is limited; a more apt title would have been *OSCEs for MRCPsych Part I*.

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### Assessment of Mental Capacity: Guidance for Doctors and Lawyers (2nd edn)

By The British Medical Association and The Law Society. London: BMJ Books. 2004. 260 pp. £19.95 (pb). ISBN 0 7279 1671 8

John Gunn, emeritus professor of forensic psychiatry at the Institute of Psychiatry, used to tell the Maudsley registrars that a copy of the Mental Health Act should be to them as a stethoscope is to a physician – they should always keep a copy to hand. The latest edition of this small book,

published jointly by the British Medical Association and The Law Society, also lays claim to must-have status – not simply for psychiatrists, but all clinicians, because (as the authors indicate on p. 31) courts tend to regard any doctor as having expertise in assessing competence. Since it is self-evident that the majority of doctors do not in fact possess such expertise, those who are required to give an opinion on mental capacity need this book much more than they need a stethoscope.

The coverage of the book is comprehensive, including (for instance) competence to consent to medical research. The style is succinct and completely clear – a pleasurable rarity from lawyers. Its counsel is wise: for example, in section 3.5 (pp. 34–5) professionals are advised against witnessing documents without first competently assessing mental capacity and recording a contemporaneous opinion.

The sands of time are flowing away from this book, because a new mental capacity act is currently being forged in Parliament and it seems inconceivable that a third edition is not being planned to coincide with the implementation of the new act, expected in 2007. Meanwhile, if this is not Gunn's stethoscope, then it should at least be designated his patella hammer.

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