



BOOK MANAGER'S CHOICE



Washington Manual of Medical Therapeutics 30/e.* Department of Medicine, Washington University. Lippincott Williams and Wilkins. 2001. R250 (including postage).

For over 40 years, practitioners have depended on *The Washington Manual* to help them make the right decisions fast. From initial patient presentation through step-by-step diagnostic and treatment procedures, this compact 'bible' of the medical ward delivers quick and easy access to the 'what to do' for virtually any condition and situation you're likely to encounter in the hospital setting. The new edition offers the latest diagnostic standards and in-patient therapeutic practices, the latest drug data, new advice for effective cross-over management, an expanded oncology chapter and more on fluids, electrolytes and ischaemic heart disease.

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BOOKS RECEIVED

The receipt of these books is acknowledged, and this listing must be regarded as sufficient return for the courtesy of the sender. Books that appear to be of particular interest will be reviewed as space permits. The SAMJ does not publish unsolicited reviews.

Adrenal Disease in Childhood. Clinical and Molecular Aspects. Edited by IA Hughes and AJL Clark. Pp. x + 177. CHF 188.-/DEM 244.-/US\$163.50. Karger. 2000. ISBN 3-8055-7015-5.

Merkel Cells, Merkel Cell Carcinoma and Neurobiology of the Skin.* Excerpta Medica. International Congress Series 1187. Edited by Hiroyuki Suzuki and Tomomichi Ono. Pp. xiii + 256. Illustrated. NLG 300/US\$ 157. Elsevier Science. 2000. ISBN 0-444-50221-1.

The Effects of Low and Very Low Doses of Ionizing Radiation on Human Health.* Edited by WONUC (World Council of Nuclear Workers). Pp. xvi + 539. NLG 350./US\$ 183.50. Elsevier Science. 2000. ISBN 0-444-50513-X.

Design and Implementation of Health Information Systems.* Edited by T Lippeveld, R Sauerborn and C Bodard. Pp. xi + 270. Sw.fr.70.-/US\$63.WHO. 2000. ISBN 92-4-1561998.

CULTURE AND COMMON MENTAL DISORDERS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Maudsley Monographs #4. By Vikram Patel. Pp.xv + 128. GBP24.95. Psychology Press. 1998. ISBN 0-86377-516-0

This is an impressive and important book. Vikram Patel records his findings from a series of linked studies on common mental disorders (CMD) in Zimbabwe. These disorders will be familiar to any primary health care practitioner in South Africa - typically, they present with a mixed picture of depression and anxiety together with somatic symptoms. Patients with such a symptom profile are often the bane of practitioners' lives as they clog up the health system with multiple complaints which may seem trivial or even imaginary. Even mental health practitioners may shy away from such patients, using terms

such as 'somatisation' as pejorative labels rather than as a way into understanding alternative cultural expressions of distress. The fact is however that this mixed and often vexing clinical picture is both common and frequently disabling. Properly recognised and treated, as Patel shows, CMD can be alleviated relatively easily.

There have been two dominant approaches to understanding CMD. The first is the conventional psychiatric approach, which attempts to classify CMD and to provide biomedical treatment algorithms. The second approach, more influenced by anthropology and the social sciences, is less concerned with taxonomy and more with the meaning of symptoms within the personal, social, and cultural context of the sufferer. What is especially laudable about Patel's work is that he successfully avoids aligning himself solely with either position. On the contrary, he takes the best from both traditions and uses a variety of perspectives to understand his material.



Patel builds his series of studies using an appropriate progression from qualitative to quantitative methods. He begins with an ethnography of concepts of mental illness held by care providers from both the professional and folk sectors (including indigenous healers), and also by relatives of psychiatric patients. He uses this study as a basis for a cross-sectional survey of primary care attenders who have been identified by their care providers as suffering from psychiatric morbidity. Through semi-structured interviews he elicits idioms of distress, including two causal models of illness. These are thinking too much (kufungisisa in Shona), and supernatural causation. These findings are used to develop a pilot version of the Shona Symptom Questionnaire (SSQ). In the following survey, Patel explores the relationship between CMD and indigenous models of illness causation, and he develops the final version of the SSQ. Patel is then able to begin his last study, a case control design to establish associated and risk factors for CMD. He finds that female gender, economic impoverishment and disability are all linked to CMD.

The logical progression from study to study and the employment of varied and appropriate methods is noteworthy, and Patel writes very clearly and accessibly. The substantive findings of the studies, both quantitative and qualitative, are important for our context. Over and beyond this, though, Patel

offers a model of lucid thinking and methodological sophistication in a very accessible form. The book will be of great interest, therefore, not only to clinicians and policy-makers but also to those who wish to teach or learn about appropriate research methods for the southern African context. I heartily recommend this book.

Leslie Swartz

IN MEMORIAM

REUBEN MIBASHAN

Reuben Mibashan was one of the most outstanding of UCT Medical School's graduates. He was born in Jerusalem on 4 January 1927, and died in London on 20 January 2001. He enjoyed a distinguished undergraduate record, receiving many class medals, graduating with a BSc at UCT in 1946, and qualifying in Medicine in 1949 with first class honours. This was at a time when these honours were only awarded once every few years.

After his internship and a year in pathology, he embarked on a career in clinical medicine, haematology and research,

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