Book Reviews

Affective Disorders in the Elderly, edited by Elaine Murphy, Medicine in Old Age Series. Pp. viii + 235, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, London, Melbourne, New York, 1986. £28.00.

The latest addition to this series (which has a reputation for its high quality and usefulness) is a series of essays about depression in its various manifestations in old age and approached from a dozen different angles by fourteen authors. Mania (Ken Shulman) and anxiety states (Robert Finlay-Jones) are left dangling at the last, rather like a pair of braces left over in the dressing routine of a forgetful old man and with some of their purpose lost from this siting.

There is a great deal to be learned from these pages and a great deal to stimulate further thinking and further applied research for there is enough dissonance between the approaches and conclusions included here to be sure that the state of knowledge is far from complete. We would all do well to compare what we read with what we see in day to day practice. Elaine Murphy's own work is well known, she reviews some of her major contributions clearly and succinctly and adds to her breadth in the essay with Alison Cooper on 'Psychological Approaches'. This, and other contributions, includes a section on consultation to patients in residential care, a topic that has often been overlooked or neglected. Their advice that if the officer in charge lacks commitment to the consultation 'move on to another establishment' seems a bit weak-kneed. Some of us would stick at it.

Swartz and Blazer's review of epidemiological studies is useful for the specialist reader (28 pages). Brice Pitt's discussion of the clinical presentations and differential diagnosis is relaxed, pithy and of interest to a wider readership (12 pages) as are the other shorter chapters by Felix Post (course and outcome, 14 pages), Eastwood and Corbin (physical illness and depression, 12 pages), and James Lindesay (suicide and attempted suicide, 16 pages). Michael Philpot's rather longer review of 'biological factors' includes 140 references. It may be well received by workers in the field and succeeds in informing the clinician of the range of endeavour that is beginning to focus on the biology of old age. The 38 pages devoted to drug and physical treatments between Bridges and Frazer may be more than most can digest and include from Bridges an assertion about the functional psychoses that should certainly stick in some throats. 'Psychiatric concepts are not needed and the disorders can be regarded as involving neurotransmitter abnormalities which are usually inherited'. And whilst it is true that much of specialist psychiatric treatment is now offered without recourse to admission to hospital, the thought occurs that Anthony Mann and Nori Graham's chapter on management at home might have included some leaven from a general practitioner – who would probably have denied that

Murphy's study of prognosis was conducted in a 'primary care setting'.

This is a worthwhile collection that will be read widely.

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AIDS: From the Beginning, edited by Helene M. Cole and George D. Lundberg. Pp. xxxviii + 441, illustrated. American Medical Association, Chicago, 1986. \$22.95.

The authors have gathered together some extremely important papers, published within the *Journal of the American Medical Association* over the past 5 years, dealing with many AIDS-related problems. It is very interesting to revisit papers which were at the forefront of our knowledge 5 years ago, which remain classics of their kind, but some are now outdated by our advancing knowledge. It is useful to have many of these references gathered together in a single book and many a researcher will find this a valuable source. Sadly the covers of the book are only slightly thicker than those of the regular *Journal* and the book is unlikely to last long in a busy reference library.

As one would expect, there have recently been several books published about AIDS. Many of these books have been orientated towards the practical management of AIDS, and as such will be invaluable to those physicians who will inevitably have to acquire the necessary management skills as AIDS becomes increasingly prevalent and spreads to new communities. There is a small section on the practical management of AIDS within this book. This section has been written by individuals who are great experts on the management of the AIDS-related problems. It is disappointing that they were not given further room in which to expand on this aspect of the problem. This book was not really intended to compete with the more practical guides now available, certainly the editors make no such claim, nonetheless it will be a disappointment to many practising clinicians, seeking help in managing AIDS cases.

I would not set out to buy this book, excellent though it is in many sections. It would not really serve me as a practical guide, while I have access to the majority of the articles via the earlier publications. True, my meanness will cause me to lose time in going back to the old journals, but many of the original articles are now of historical interest only. I shall invest my money in continuing subscriptions to the many excellent journals, including the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, which strive to keep one up to date with the rapid developments in AIDS and would recommend that my colleagues do likewise.

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