



Practical child psychiatry: the clinician's guide

Bryan Lask, Sharon Taylor, Kenneth Nunn (eds). Published by the BMJ Publishing Group, 2003. ISBN 0-7279-1593-2. Contains 400 pages. Price GBP35.00

This is a great little book, which achieves its dual aims of being concise, practical and accessible and being intended for use by the 'busy clinician'. The wisdom and experience of the authors shine through and while openly declaring its role is not to provide 'a detailed critique of the literature nor a detailed review of the latest research findings' the backing from such sources is apparent in much of the excellent direct advice provided. Anyone looking for polemics will be disappointed!

It is an 'easy read', but written at two levels, depending on which of the three sections one is using. The first two are introductory and include a short overview and assessment section followed by a large synoptic 'clinical picture' section (over 200 pages), which is admirable in its breadth, especially regarding consultation liaison topics. Of necessity, each chapter is brief (5–15 pages) and includes developmental variation in clinical presentation across ages where appropriate, for example, in the chapter on fears and anxieties.

However, those wanting to use this publication as a springboard into specific further reading may find the brevity of the references or 'further reading' lists frustrating. For example, there are just three suggested further reading texts in the chapter on psychosis, all of them books. But you were warned! Nevertheless, I can easily picture clinical heads of services thrusting this book into the hands of all new appointees and advising them to read the first two sections over the weekend before starting work.

The third 'treatment' section is quite different. Indeed, virtually all the 20 clinical picture topics treatments are cross-referenced to it and there is something for more experienced clinicians to ponder. The chapters on parental and family treatment, psychotherapy and cognitive behavioural treatment are excellent overviews. The last on psychopharmacology outlines very sound principles and has three detailed tables covering: suggested condition treatment algorithms; side-effect syndromes tabulated against all medication groupings; and specific prescribing details for 51 'psychotropic medications in childhood' (40 pages). Here, time (always a hazard for books) and the effects of different countries' health-funding policies start to bite. Eight of the hit-list medications are unavailable in New Zealand. Another nine are unsubsidised and therefore generally not affordable, two have cost premiums and two (paroxetine and venlafaxine) have recently had manufacturer's warnings put out against use in patients under 18 years of age. These NZ restrictions have a significant impact on the medication treatment algorithms presented. In practice, the list of 51 medications becomes just 20 for our regional inpatient unit. An earlier suggestion to use thioridazine for agitation has not been expunged although concerns about its use (QTc prolongation) are indicated later.

These provisos aside this remains a great little book, which is warmly recommended.

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