Book review

Pharmacotherapy of Depression

Editors Domenic A. Ciraulo & Richard I. Shader

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The term 'depression' is used in three different ways: it can designate low mood, or a clinical syndrome in which low mood is just one of the prominent features (depressive illness), or a disease characterized by the propensity to develop episodes of depressive illness (affective disorder). I guess the title of this book refers to the treatment of depressive illness and/or recurrent affective disorder. The treatment of low mood *per se* requires treatment only infrequently, and psychological treatments (e.g. counselling) may be more appropriate than drugs. Depression (depressive illness) is one of the most common psychiatric disorders, creating a therapeutic challenge for both primary care physicians and hospital practitioners. Although nondrug therapeutic interventions (e.g. cognitive behavioural therapy, social support, etc.) may be effective, and their role and applicability have been emphasized by the recent guidelines of the National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE), as opposed to the indiscriminate use of antidepressant drugs, the fact remains that drug treatment is still the main treatment modality for depressed patients.

This up-to-date multiauthor book aims at reviewing and critically evaluating our current knowledge on the treatment of depressive illness by pharmacological measures. Some cohesion is given to the book that all the authors, with a few exceptions, work in Boston, Massachusetts, and also, that the book grew out of a postgraduate course provided by the authors. Although this cohesiveness is an advantage, there is also a down-side to it: the clinical recommendations reflect the clinical practice of a confined area of the USA, and may not be shared by practitioners working in different geographical and cultural locations.

The book consists of 10 chapters which quite clearly fall into two categories: the first two chapters cover general knowledge relating to the biological theories of

depression (Chapter 1: Goldstein and Potter) and the clinical pharmacology and therapeutics of antidepressants (Chapter 2: Ciraulo, Tsirulnik-Barts, Shader and Greenblatt). These chapters are excellent, well written and comprehensive, with references going up as far as 2002. The following eight chapters cover special patient groups (e.g. elderly patients, patients suffering from bipolar affective disorder, psychotic patients, patients with substance abuse, patients infected by HIV and/or suffering from AIDS, patients with depression within the context of post-traumatic stress disorder, pregnant and lactating women, children and adolescents). The first two chapters take up one-third of the book and provide a lasting contribution to the literature. The chapters dealing with special groups of patients are of a more variable quality, and it is understandable that some of the clinical recommendations contained in them may not be shared by everybody and could well be superseded with the passage of time. In conclusion, I can highly recommend the first two chapters, whereas I retain some reservations regarding the other chapters, mainly due to the more ephemeral nature of the information contained in them.

The book has a special feature: it includes an 'eBook'. The eBook is a CD-ROM attached to the book which contains an Adobe version of the volume, which can be viewed on one computer only designated by the reader. This is an interesting facility; however, I am not sure how useful it is. Furthermore, this 'high tech' feature of the book may explain the very high price which may well put the book outside the reach of many potential purchasers.

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