Book review

Fundamentals of Psychoneuroimmunology

by Cai Song & Brian E. Leonard

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Song & Leonard have written a good, basic book that introduces the reader to the very complex area of psychoneuroimmunology. The book is structured as an introductory review of the literature and a series of chapters on separate topics that report general principles, describe pivotal findings and provide a list of suggested references.

I particularly liked the possibility of looking at the role of the immune system in a variety of psychological, psychiatric and medical conditions (stress, depression, schizophrenia, anxiety, Alzheimer disease, chronic fatigue syndrome, autoimmune disorders, HIV infection). I found the chapter on the use of animal models in psychoneuroimmunology especially interesting, not only because this topic is less often discussed in other similar textbooks, but also because the authors use their own research experience in this field. The choice of the topics for some other chapters is less clear. Why, for example, dedicate a whole chapter to the polyunsaturated fatty acids and another one only to the thymus gland? Other anatomical structures or biological components, like the adrenal glands, the

hypothalamus, or the glucocorticoid hormones, have an important role in the communication between the brain, the endocrine and the immune systems.

Overall, the authors succeed in their aim to 'demonstrate the importance of psychoneuroimmunology to the practising physician and experimental neuroscientists' (p. viii). This is indeed a 'concise and stimulating text' (p. viii). However, it is more difficult to use as a reference textbook. For example, the access to the original sources of information is limited and there are no references in the text. For those who are already in this field of research it may be too introductory. For students, scientists or clinicians with an interest in psychoneuroimmunology, that are just starting a career in this field, it is a useful source of background information and university libraries should consider its purchase.

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