What your patients may be reading

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"It must be your nerves" is a common enough remark, but when it comes to psychological problems where do people turn for help? The very idea of having a mental disorder can be a cause of embarrassment, distress, and loss of self esteem. Fear of the unknown and not understanding the problem can only make matters worse. Self help books can be a source of advice and support, and there is an ever increasing number for all kinds of psychological problems. Some simply provide information about a particular problem; others are self help manuals that provide step by step approaches to overcoming it. Many adopt the case history approach, which can be useful in showing readers that they are not alone in their own fears and anxieties.

An outstanding recent example is *Psychological Problems: Who Can Help?* by Hilary Edwards (£3.95 paperback. Leicester: British Psychological Society, 1987. ISBN 0-901715-76-X). The author is senior clinical psychologist with Milton Keynes Health Authority. The book is not a self help manual. It does not set out to enable readers to tackle problems on their own. Instead it describes the psychological therapies used by professionals working with people with problems such as anxiety, depression, sleeping problems, compulsions, and phobias. Something like a third of patients visiting their general practitioner each day have psychological problems like these. Common problems are illustrated through the use of case histories. The theme is the establishment with the therapist of achievable goals. We follow the treatment of John Sidman, a primary school teacher charged with supervision of the pets' corner as he overcomes his phobia of cats. His final target is to play with some kittens (10 minutes minimum). In addition to these case studies first hand accounts are given of the work of 12 different professionals including a clinical psychologist, a psychiatrist, a social worker, a nurse therapist, and a worker for MIND (National Association for Mental Health). A useful feature is a checklist of qualifications (explaining why your psychologist may also be called Doctor because of a PhD).

Psychology and You: an Informal Introduction by Julia Berryman, David Hargreaves, Kevin Howells, and Clive Hollin, is a companion volume from the British Psychological Society (£6.50 paperback. ISBN 0-901715-71-9). This is no self help manual either, but a general introduction to psychology as a subject. As the authors comment, psychology rarely forms part of the school curriculum and most people glean their knowledge from television, radio, magazines, and popular books. It is surprisingly difficult to find a book that introduces the discipline in an up to date manner and, as this book does, gives sufficient recommendations for further reading for those who wish to explore aspects in more detail.

Don't expect to find self help tips in *Preventing Mental Illness* by Jennifer Newton (£25.00 hardback. London: Routledge, 1988. ISBN 0-7102-0930-4). Although arising from a project set up by MIND, it is essentially an academic work, reviewing the research relating to prevention and focusing on depression and schizophrenia as examples of what might be possible. Voluntary community services are seen as an essential component of preventive services, and there are interesting observations on the role of volunteer counsellors. *Living With Mental Illness* by Liz Kuipers and Paul Bobbington (£6.95 paperback. London: Souvenir Press, 1987. ISBN 0-285-65053-X) is, as its subtitle suggests, *A Book for Relatives and Friends*. The onset of mental illness can be a devastating experience for both sufferers and their families. Policies

of caring for mentally ill people in the community place great burdens on families, and this book sets out to answer some of their questions. It explains what it is like to have a mental illness, describes possible symptoms and causes, and suggests ways in which friends and relatives can cope on a day to day basis. Possible legal and financial problems are discussed in detail and the book also contains details of useful self help groups.

Overcoming common psychological problems

One of these groups, the Schizophrenia Association, holds the view that schizophrenia is primarily biological in origin and suggests nutritional approaches to its treatment. A similar angle is taken by Carl Pfeiffer in his *Mental Illness and Schizophrenia: the Nutrition Connection* (£4.99 paperback. Wellingborough: Thorsons, 1987. ISBN 0-7225-1465-4). He puts forward an "orthomolecular" theory (supplying the body's cells with the right mix of nutrients) and indicts much drug treatment in mental illness. For Pfeiffer the key to depression and other mental illnesses in many people is a deficiency of zinc and vitamin B6. Other recent titles from Thorsons include books on bulimia, hypnotherapy, and violence in the home. *Coping With Bulimia: the Binge/Purge Syndrome* by Barbara French (£4.99. Wellingborough: Thorsons, 1987. ISBN 0-7225-1380-1) provides a clear account of the condition, written by a state registered nurse who has experienced bulimia herself. Although several other self help books deal with eating disorders, most of them concentrate on anorexia nervosa. This one distinguishes clearly between the two and emphasises the important differences. For example, while it is difficult to keep anorexia a secret, women with bulimia may suffer privately for many years, too ashamed to ask for help. It is here that self help books can be particularly useful. *Coping with Bulimia* describes the main signs and symptoms and contains a detailed self help programme illustrated with clinical examples.

An ever growing number of doctors and dentists are using hypnosis, and a new book by Helmut Karle, principal psychologist at Guy's Hospital, attempts to dispel the many myths and misconceptions surrounding it. (*Hypnosis and Hypnotherapy: a Patient's Guide*. £2.99 paperback. Wellingborough: Thorsons, 1988. ISBN 0-7225-1460-3). After outlining the history of hypnosis Dr Karle explains how it works and gives advice on finding a qualified hypnotherapist. The book then shows how hypnosis can be used in treating many physical and psychological conditions.

Janine Turner was a battered wife and a founder member of Depressives Anonymous and of Lifeline, an organisation dealing with the problems surrounding violence in the home. In *Behind Closed Doors* (£4.99 paperback. Wellingborough: Thorsons, 1988. ISBN 0-7225-1567-7) she shows the terrible consequences of violence in the home: depression, fear, alcohol and drug abuse, the inability to make a second, loving relationship. But the book concludes on a positive note with practical advice, a detailed listing of advisory agencies, and a chapter on the possibility of a second chance in a better relationship.

Depression and stress

One of the latest titles in the increasingly comprehensive Penguin Health series is *Defeating Depression* by Tony Lake (£3.95 paperback. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987. ISBN 0-14-010108-X.) No matter how it is triggered depression can leave the sufferer drained of the will to fight back and not knowing where to turn for help.

Relief may be sought through the advice and sympathy of friends, with medication from the doctor, professional counselling, or group therapy. The author helps readers to recognise their own kind of depression and to make the most of the help available from these and other sources, including self help groups. The theme of *Coping With Depression and Elation* by Patrick McKeon (£3.95 paperback. London: Sheldon Press, 1986. ISBN 0-85969-503-4) is "mood swings." According to the author, these are the oldest recorded mental illnesses and have been described in the Old Testament and in the works of Homer and Hippocrates. Nowadays disorders of mood account for a high proportion of psychiatric consultations. Use of the term "manic depression" is avoided throughout for, as Dr McKeon observes, it can conjure up worrying images of unpredictability and violence. His book describes in a straightforward way the known causes, symptoms, and treatments of depressive moods. The unfortunate consequences of mood swings (alcohol abuse, overspending, sexual indiscretions) are outlined, and there are details of treatment with lithium and with psychotherapy.

Coping with Depression and Elation is one of a series of 70 popular medical titles published by Sheldon Press. Half of these deal with psychological problems, including a new book on *Overcoming Stress* by Vernon Coleman (£4.95 paperback. London: Sheldon Press, 1988. ISBN 0-85969-560-3). Dr Coleman is the author of over 30 popular health books, which together have sold over a million copies. The press release accompanying *Overcoming Stress* announces it as "his next best seller." In fact it was originally published 10 years ago under the title *Stress Control*. This revised edition gives the reader practical tips on recognising and overcoming stress in everyday life. Sources of social strains include work: repetitive tasks on the conveyor belt are, claims the author, matched only by coping with the bureaucracy of the reorganised National Health Service. An additional strain is seen as modern sexual expectations. "It is far more acceptable to admit publicly that you enjoy wrapping your neighbour's wife in black plastic than to admit that you spend Saturday evenings curled up with a good book." The other new stress book is less down to earth. *Stress Management: a Comprehensive Guide to Your Wellbeing* by Edward Charlesworth and Ronald Nathan (£4.95 paperback. London: Corgi, 1987. ISBN 0-552-99269-0) is by two American authors experienced in running stress workshops for top companies. Like Coleman's book *Stress Management* gives advice on recognising stress and on relaxation techniques, but it spends a lot of time saying some fairly obvious things (like making lists of tasks to "optimize your performance").

Helping children to cope

Emotional problems are not, of course, confined to adults. By telling the true stories of some of the families she has worked with in a child and family guidance clinic Penny Jacques describes a wide range of difficulties with children in her book *Understanding Children's Problems: Helping Families to Help Themselves* (£3.95 paperback. London: Unwin, 1987. ISBN 0-04-649057-4). Most parents have worries at some stage of family life. Those who sail through the early years coping with the demands of babies and small children may find teenagers bring them down with a crash. Others may find the early years a nightmare and then thoroughly enjoy their children when they become more independent. The true stories in this book range from the well known torture of the sleepless baby, through childhood fears and nightmares, to the problems of adoptive families and those going through divorce. The outcome of many of the stories offers hope for similarly affected families.

With the best will in the world it can be very difficult for parents to find the right words to explain a difficult situation. There are many books written for children to help them to cope with the problems of everyday life. Drawing on his experiences as a father of a young family and a children's author, Tony Bradman has compiled an invaluable guide, *I Need a Book: the Parents' Guide to Children's Books for Special Situations* (£2.50 paperback. Wellingborough: Thorsons, 1987. ISBN 0-7225-1472-7). It covers most of the readily available books for children up to the age of 7 or 8. For example, there is the excellent Althea series (*I Have Asthma, I Have Diabetes, I Can't Talk Like You*, etc), which has introduced many children, their brothers and sisters, and friends to the problems of living with a disability. (Further details from Dinosaur Publications, 8 Grafton Street, London W1X 3LA.) There are books to lessen the fear of going to the dentist or the doctor. Others cover the traumas of moving house, starting school, or the arrival of a new baby. *I Need a Book* would be an inexpensive guide that would be useful not only for parents themselves but for anyone building up a collection of children's books for use in a health centre or paediatric department, for example. No prices are given, which is perhaps reasonable given the speed at which they change, but it would be useful to have the date of publication of the books listed. One of the titles listed is a favourite of my own children, *Gorilla* by Anthony Browne (£1.50 paperback. London: Magnet, 1985. ISBN 0-416-52460-5), about a busy father who has little time for his daughter. At the end the father takes a break from his writing and finds time to take the child to the zoo. Children's books can make parents rethink their priorities too.

Some new titles

Accident and emergency

Head Injury Management for Providers of Emergency Care. G W Tyson. (Pp 288; figs; price not stated.) Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins, 1987. ISBN 0-683-08498-4.

Addiction

UK Smoking Statistics. N Wald, S Kiryluk, S Darby *et al.* (Pp 232; £35 paperback.) Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988. ISBN 0-19-261572-6.

Allergy

The Hay Fever Handbook. A Summer Survival Plan. R N Turner. (Pp 192; £2.99 paperback.) Wellingborough: Thorsons, 1988. ISBN 0-7225-1592-8.

Is Your Child Allergic? A Guide for Parents. J A Kuzemko. (Pp 144; figs; £3.99 paperback.) Wellingborough: Thorsons, 1988. ISBN 0-7225-1434-4.

Alternative medicine

The Non-Meridial Points of Acupuncture. R Low. (Pp 112; figs; £14.95.) Wellingborough: Thorsons, 1988. ISBN 0-7225-1483-2.

Anaesthesia

Regional Anesthesia. M Zenz, C Panhans, H Chr. Niesel, H Kreuscher. (Pp 248; figs and colour plates; £40.) Chicago: Year

Book Medical Publishers, 1988. Distributed by Wolfe Medical Publications. ISBN 0-7234-1510-2.

Anatomy

Oxford Textbook of Functional Anatomy. Vol 2. "Thorax and Abdomen." P C B MacKinnon, J F Morris. (Pp 148; £11.95 paperback.) Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988. ISBN 0-19-261518-1.

Biology

Basic Molecular and Cell Biology. Articles from the *British Medical Journal*. (Pp 120; figs; £5.95, overseas £7.50 (\$12) paperback, including postage, airmail overseas. BMA members £5.45, overseas £7 (\$11), including postage.) London: British Medical Journal, 1988. ISBN 0-7279-0219-9.

Biochemistry and Biotechnology Series. "Understanding Histochemistry: Selection, Evaluation and Design of Biological Stains." R W Horobin. Series editor A Wiseman. (Pp 172; £32.50.) Chichester: Ellis Horwood, 1988. Distributed by John Wiley and Sons. ISBN 0-85312-678-X.

Electron Microscopy in Biology and Medicine. Current Topics in Ultrastructural Research. Vol 4. "Ultrastructure of the Digestive Tract." Ed P M Motta, H Fujita, S Correr. Series editor P M Motta. (Pp 288; figs; £63.95.) Boston: Nijhoff, 1988. Distributed by MTP Press. ISBN 0-89838-893-7.

Host Factors in Disease. Age, Sex, Racial and Ethnic Group, and

Body Build. A P Polednak. (Pp 224; figs; \$29.75.) Illinois: Thomas, 1987. ISBN 0-398-05382-0.

Cardiology

Ablation in Cardiac Arrhythmias. Ed G Fontaine, M M Scheinman. (Pp 518; figs; \$75.) New York: Futura, 1987. ISBN 0-87993-274-0.

Balloon Catheter Coronary Angioplasty. P Angelini. (Pp 368; figs; \$98.) New York: Futura, 1987. ISBN 0-87993-307-0.

Cardiac Arrhythmias: Where To Go From Here? Ed P Brugada, H J J Wellens. (Pp 848; figs; \$98.) New York: Futura, 1987. ISBN 0-87993-306-2.

Nonpharmacological Therapy of Tachyarrhythmias. Ed G Breithardt, M Borggrefe, D P Zipes. (Pp 528; figs; \$65.) New York: Futura, 1987. ISBN 0-87993-305-4.

Practical Problems in Medicine. "Practical Management of Ischaemic Heart Disease." G Jackson. (Pp 240; figs; £29.95.) London: Dunitz, 1988. ISBN 0-948269-25-1.

Diabetes

Clinical Tests: Diabetes Mellitus. Laboratory Tests and Self-Monitoring. B J Boucher, I S Ross. (Pp 88; figs; £15 paperback.) London: Wolfe, 1988. ISBN 0-7234-0918-8.

Diabetes Health Care. A Guide to the Provision of Health Care Services. R D Hill. (Pp 296; colour plates; £15 paperback.) London: Chapman and Hall, 1987. ISBN 0-412-27330-6.