Brit. J. Psychiat. (1982), **141**, 94–96

Reading About . . .

Psychiatry for Undergraduates

R. H. S. Mindham

The reading matter one would recommend to medical undergraduate students clearly depends upon one's own view of the purposes and aims of teaching this group of students in departments of psychiatry. Aims may not be limited to psychiatry itself, and some teachers see the development of interviewing skills, self-awareness, and personal development as being at least as important as the teaching of more technical aspects of medicine such as the psychological aspects of physical disorders, recognition of psychiatric syndromes, psychiatric treatments, the use of the Mental Health Acts, and the organization of psychiatric services and their relation with other medical services.

I must state my own position clearly: I see the main purposes of undergraduate teaching of psychiatry as being first, to teach sufficient psychiatry to students to allow them to recognize and deal with the psychiatric problems they will encounter in surgery, medicine, obstetrics and gynaecology, radiology, and in other medical specialities; and secondly, to present the subject in a way which will stimulate the interest of those who will subsequently gain further experience of psychiatry at a postgraduate level as part of training for work in general practice or training in psychiatry itself. It is a sobering fact that most of the students passing through departments of psychiatry will have no further training in psychiatry after they have completed the requirements of the undergraduate medical course, and for this reason I believe that the course should primarily be arranged to meet their needs.

Which of the text books on psychiatry present a well-balanced account of the subject and can be read and digested by students in a few weeks of psychiatric clerkship without doing violence to the facts or offending any particular group of psychiatrists? I have a personal preference for the descriptive approach to psychiatry. Generally, students find this easier to understand as it more closely resembles teaching approaches to other subjects in the medical curriculum. In their recent survey of undergraduates in an American medical school Nielson and Eaton found students to be highly critical of much of their psychiatric teaching and to show a strong preference for firmly based information which bears a clear relationship to other parts of medical practice. The findings of this study would support the use of a descriptive experimental approach to this particular group of trainees.

Among the available undergraduate text books of psychiatry the leading contenders of this type are *Psychiatry* by Anderson and Trethowan and *Fish's Outline of Psychiatry* by Hamilton. Some students find the former hard going because it is so compact in style, and also comment that it gives a relatively limited space to treatment. The latter, having had a very distinctive style under its progenitor, has been revised by a successor with similarly contentious and forceful views; this could be a difficult combination but a good result has been achieved in this case without detracting from the clarity and style of the original. Stafford-Clark's *Psychiatry for Students* has undergone a similar change of authorship but with a less good result. The original book gave a very acceptable, if occasionally idiosyncratic, view of psychiatry (with a very good section on children and adolescents by a psychiatrist who has since turned to other things); since the necessary up-dating the styles of the old and new authors are clearly discernible and lead to a discontinuity in the book which leaves it less satisfactory than the original. Similarly, Curran, Partridge and Storey's *Psychological Medicine* has passed through several editions and changes in authorship in almost forty years and, in spite of its merits, would benefit from re-writing.

More recently there has been a number of books written from particular standpoints such as *UCH Handbook of Psychiatry for Students and General Practitioners* by Tredgold and Wolff which stresses the psychotherapeutic approach, and *A Short Text Book of Psychiatry* by Linford Rees which emphasises biological aspects of psychiatry and a pharmacological approach to treatment. These books each have their virtues but to me present psychiatry in a somewhat unbalanced way, over-stating a particular aspect of the subject. The many undergraduate texts certainly show how difficult it is to write a really

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007125000081046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

satisfactory undergraduate text book of psychiatry. Few have received wide acceptance, and all date rapidly. If text books are difficult to write, chapters of psychiatry in general medical textbooks are even more difficult; successful examples include the chapter in *Price's Textbook of the Practice of Medicine* originally by Aubrey Lewis and more recently by Michael Shepherd; and the chapter in *A Short Textbook of Medicine* by Houston, Joiner and Trounce originally by Stafford-Clark, now by Willis. It is very much to be regretted that the former has never been available as a separate book.

These are the bread-and-butter undergraduate text books, however, all having their good points and weaknesses, and many experiencing popularity for a time. But which other books might stimulate interest, excite the minds of the students, help recruitment to the speciality of psychiatry, and lead to a deeper knowledge and understanding of the subject? My first choice is Anthony Clare's book *Psychiatry in Dissent*. This is a lively, well-written book which squarely faces some of the controversial issues in psychiatry and discusses them sensibly and broadly and at the same time giving the interested student access to a selected bibliography. This is not only a book to be recommended for its content; it is also of a size and nature which a student can cope with during a psychiatric clerkship alongside a more orthodox textbook. For more detailed information I recommend Granville-Grossman's *Recent Advances in Clinical Psychiatry* and Snaith's recent book *Clinical Neurosis*. The former is a very useful guide to recent developments which has maintained a remarkably high standard throughout its three editions; the latter is a review of the difficult area of the neuroses, a group of disorders which fit the medical model of disease rather poorly and confuse the undergraduate student a good deal. Both publications would be a good source of reference for the more able student who wishes to read around the subject but who does not have a great deal of time in which to do it. For those who wish to read more of psychotherapy I recommend Brown and Pedder's *Introduction to Psychotherapy* which gives a beginner's guide to psychotherapy and its origins in a clear style without extensive use of jargon. Similarly Philip Barker's *Basic Child Psychiatry* has few rivals in presenting a clear, helpful and generally acceptable account of child and adolescent psychiatry.

How does psychiatry relate to clinical medicine as a whole and to the basic medical sciences studied extensively in the early part of the curriculum? Links may at times seem to be tenuous but they are nevertheless important. A very good modern view of brain function is given in the Scientific American publication *The Brain*. The contributors provide a broad integrated view of the relationship between brain structure, function and behaviour. This task is tackled in a more ambitious but very successful way in *Principles of Neural Science* by Kandel and Schwarz. This is an admirable book which relates basic neuroanatomy, physiology and pharmacology to behaviour and to clinical neurology and psychiatry. This book is likely to become a standard text for psychiatrists in training but will also appeal to the undergraduate who is moving into clinical work from the basic sciences. In psychopharmacology Silverstone and Turner's book *Drug Treatment in Psychiatry* relates basic pharmacology with the use of drugs in clinical practice; similarly *Psychopharmacology of Affective Disorders* by Paykel and Coppen places emphasis on the pharmacological basis of drug treatment. In a more restricted field Bond's book *Pain: its Nature, Analysis and Treatment* attempts to bring together information relevant to this most important of clinical symptoms.

What texts of a more general kind can be recommended to supplement reading of technical books? Should students read some of the many literary descriptions of mental disorder from such notable examples as: *Madame Bovary* (Flaubert), *Crime and Punishment* (Dostoyevsky), *The Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger)? Some students would enjoy such works but I would choose to recommend three books which I believe to be particularly important. First, William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience;* what doctor can understand his patients' problems without some knowledge of religious experiences and of different religions? Secondly, some knowledge of Freud's writings and of those of his followers is virtually essential in present-day practice because many patients are familiar with the ideas presented and, sometimes, with the writings themselves. Without hesitation I would recommend the abridged version of Ernest Jones's *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud* which not only covers Freud's work but sets it in the context in which it was performed. Finally, I recommend some re-reading of the works of Shakespeare; no better descriptions of psychopathology have ever been given, and the experience will provide a timely reminder that the psychological mechanisms of defence were not discovered in the nineteenth century.

This is not an exhaustive list by any means but a selective list which I believe might help a medical undergraduate reading psychiatry simply to pass his examinations, or to develop a deeper interest in the subject.

References

A SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN BOOK (1979) *The Brain*. San Francisco: W. H. Freeman.

BARKER, P. (1977) *Basic Child Psychiatry*. London: Crosby Lockwood, Staples.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007125000081046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

BOND, M. R. (1979) *Pain, its Nature, Analysis and Treatment*. Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone.

BROWN, D. & PEDDER, J. (1979) *Introduction to Psychotherapy: An Outline of Psychodynamic Principles and Practice*. London: Tavistock Publications.

CLARE, A. (1980) *Psychiatry in Dissent: Controversial Issues in Thought and Practice*. 2nd edition. London: Tavistock Publications.

CURRAN, D., PARTRIDGE, M. & STOREY, P. (1980) *Psychological Medicine: an Introduction to Psychiatry*. 9th edition. Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone.

DOSTOYEVSKY, F. (1866) *Crime and Punishment*. 3rd Edition (1951). Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

FLAUBERT, G. (1950) *Madame Bovary*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

GRANVILLE-GROSSMAN, K. (1971, 1975, 1979) *Recent Advances in Clinical Psychiatry*. Vols 1, 2 and 3. Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone.

HAMILTON, M. (1978) *Fish's Outline of Psychiatry*. 3rd Edition. Bristol: John Wright.

JAMES, W. (1960) *The Varieties of Religious Experience: The Gifford Lectures* 1901–2. 3rd Edition. London: Fontana.

JONES, E. (1954) *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*. (3rd Edition (1964), (eds. L. Trilling and S. Marcus). Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

KANDEL, E. R. & SCHWARZ, J. H. (1981) *Principles of Neural Science*. London: Edward Arnold.

NIELSON, A. C. & EATON, J. S. (1981) Medical students' attitudes about psychiatry. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, **38**, 1144–54.

PAYKEL, E. S. & COPPEN, A. (1979) *Psychopharmacology of Affective Disorders*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

REES, W. L. (1976) *A Short Textbook of Psychiatry*. 2nd Edition. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

SALINGER, J. D. (1958) *The Catcher in the Rye*. First published (1951). Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

SHAKESPEARE, W. (1978) *The Complete Works*. London: Collins.

SHEPHERD, M. (1978) Section 18. Psychological medicine. In *Price's Textbook of the Practice of Medicine*. 12th Edition, (ed. R Bodley Scott), pp 1405–50 Oxford: Medical Publications.

SILVERSTONE, T. & TURNER, P. (1974) *Drug Treatment in Psychiatry*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

SNAITH, R. P. (1981) *Clinical Neurosis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

STAFFORD CLARK, D. & SMITH, A. C. (1978) *Psychiatry for Students*. 5th Edition. London: George Allen and Unwin.

TREDGOLD, R. & WOLFF, H. (1975) *U.C.H. Handbook of Psychiatry for Students and General Practitioners*. 2nd Edition. London: Dunkworth.

TRETHOWAN, W. H. (1979) *Anderson and Trethowan Psychiatry*. 4th Edition. London: Ballière Tindall.

WILLIS, J. (1975) Psychiatry. In *A Short Textbook of Medicine*. 5th Edition, (eds. J. C. Houston, C. L. Joiner and J. R. Trounce). London: The English Universities Press.

Nuffield Professor of Psychiatry, University Department of Psychiatry, 15 Hyde Terrace, Leeds, LS2 9LT

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007125000081046 Published online by Cambridge University Press