Book reviews

Late-Life Depression
Edited by S. P. Roose and H. A. Sackeim
This claims to be ‘the first volume devoted to the epidemiology, phenomenology, psychobiology, treatment and consequences of depression in late life’. The editors intend the book for clinicians, researchers, teachers and students. They describe it as a ‘view of the landscape’ (perhaps justifying the attractive cover picture).

I would not dissent from their arguments regarding the importance of late-life depression, its costs, and impact, nor with the argument that we cannot automatically extrapolate what we know about a disorder at younger ages to older adults. This last argument does not fit with chapters which include findings from earlier in life (age 55 plus), when in reality we might argue that old age is starting later: our National Director for Older People’s Health recently reported that health in late life is improving with increasing life expectancy at age 65. If the retirement age goes up, what will that mean for our understanding of old age (and what effect will it have on depressive disorders)?

I would prefer a book that is easier to read (especially in bed), fits onto my bookshelf, has a stronger emphasis on social and psychological aspects, and which is less United States centric. I am sad that the chapter on electroconvulsive therapy, although inevitably one of my favourites, is three times the length of the chapter on psychotherapy. I would not recommend this book to a clinical colleague or a student (apart from specific chapters), but I would buy it for the library as a reference volume.

Susan M. Benbow
NIMHE Fellow in Ageing & Mental Health & Professor of Mental Health & Ageing, University of Staffordshire
Email: DrSMBenbow@aol.com
doi:10.1093/ageing/afi169

Towards Quality Care: Outcomes for Older People in Care Homes
By C. Godlove, C. Sutcliffe, H. Bagley, L. Cordingley, D. Challis, P. Huxley and A Burns
This book recognises ‘that the provision of high quality care in residential nursing homes and the regulation and maintenance of standards in them is a source of concern for societies around the globe’. Out of sight and out of mind, older people are warehoused and lose control of their environment and of their dignity, and continue to receive variable standards of care provided by poorly trained, inadequately supervised and poorly paid staff. This book describes a recent research project by the Personal Social Services Research Unit team in Manchester into care homes and their residents. It not only confirms the need to continue to improve and develop care standards, but also provides the reader with very useful information about these vulnerable older people and a guide as to what makes a good care home.

The study looked at individual residents’ characteristics, depression, physical functioning, quality of life and global outcome measures in 35 care homes. In addition, measurements of aspects of care including physical and social environment, public or private life, activity and home management as well as organisation were examined. Researchers talked to staff and evaluated their job satisfaction, their mental health, staff ratios, staff qualification and in-service training.

The study’s findings suggest that it is possible to use direct rather than informant-based research methods, even in the

Talking Over the Years. A Handbook of Dynamic Psychotherapy with Older Adults
Edited by S. Evans and J. Garner
Everyone involved in the care of ill old people should have a copy of this book. Do not be frightened by the phrase ‘dynamic psychotherapy’: the book is not obscure or exotic, it assumes no prior knowledge nor even a favourable leaning towards psychodynamic thinking, and although the first seven chapters take the great names in the history of psychotherapy as their starting point, the whole book says far more about people than about theories.

The editors have successfully given their book a coherent flavour and purpose, but each chapter also stands alone, rich in clinical experience. Some describe specialist work (music, dance and art therapies for instance): you admire, and wish that you had such colleagues working with you. Others speak directly to the everyday tasks of nurses and doctors with older patients: my favourites are Roger Wesby on ‘Inpatient dynamics’ and Noel Hess on ‘Loneliness in old age: Klein and others’. Throughout the book are planted clinical vignettes, enlightening and moving, reminders to us of the living heart of our work, and of why we keep doing it day after day.

Catherine Oppenheimer
Email: Catherine.Oppenheimer@oxmhc-tr.nhs.uk
doi:10.1093/ageing/afi170