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Book Review

Fundamentals of Psychiatry

5th EDITION

by

EDWARD A. STRECKER, M. D.

Book Review by MARTIN H. HOFFMAN, M. D. of the Detroit Catholic Physicians' Guild and The Guild of Catholic Psychiatrists

TO THE NEOPHYTE in the field of Psychiatry, to the student, whether in Medicine or Nursing, to the untrained General Practitioner and even to the interested lay reader, this volume presents a wealth of information, written in a facile style, that instructs, but does not overwhelm nor bore.

It covers the field of Psychiatry from almost every facet and is brought right up to the moment of the latest conceptions and therapies. Nonetheless, it retains most of the ingrained and time proven principles which are the real Fundamentals of Psychiatry.

Books of this kind are especially needed by those for whom they are meant. There is altogether too much being written and published in recent years that is filled with polysyllabic verbiages, which sometimes makes readers wonder if the writers themselves really know what they are trying to say. It is usually "so far over the head" of the untrained, inexperienced student, whether or not he or she is scientifically trained, that it only bewilders and befuddles, rather than helps or educates. Therefore, this reviewer is happy to cast his vote for approval of this book, which is actually practical as well as understandable.

The opening sentence in the Preface hits the keynote—"The outstanding need of Psychiatry is personnel—much more personnel." This edition is addressed to "general practitioners and workers in every area of medicine and surgery—who *should* and *must* treat great numbers of patients suffering from psychoneurotic and psychosomatic disabilities."

The first chapter is a brief, concise, but interesting history of Psychiatry followed by the Second on *Etiology*. In this chapter, the part on, "The Emotions in Psychiatry" is of special significance and importance. Skipping to Chapter Five titled, "Methods of Examinations and Symptoms," we find a number of good suggestions—"Let the patient tell his story." "Observe carefully. Frequently the more valuable impressions are gained by observation, without overmuch questioning."

Perhaps, this is a little too detailed for a busy general practitioner—yet, it is of extreme value to enable him to understand and to know what to look for. In the body of the next Chapter on, "Organic Psychoses," there is a good description of the technique of procedure of Malaria treatment for Paresis, in such form that a general practitioner could carry on such treatment, with proper nursing assistance, in a family home.

Of Epilepsy and its treatment, the reviewer must take issue with one sweeping statement, viz. "The continuous use of large doses of bromides is deplorable." There are exceptions to all rules. Quite a number of such exceptions are known both personally, to this reviewer, and through histories of many confreres, where bromides were the only answer, due to drug reactions, intolerance, excessive drowsiness, etc. We hold, however, to the general dictum that Dilantin, usually aided by the seemingly catalytic action of small amounts of Phenobarbital, is probably the outstanding treatment and the choice.

Chapter Seven deals with the subject of, "The Toxic Psychoses." Under treatment of Alcoholics, the author fails to even mention the possibility of help through the aid of religion, the assistance of a Spiritual Advisor and the benefits of prayer. Essentially, the great advancement and help of Alcoholics Anonymous is based upon its almost being a substitute for a religion especially to those without one. Too often throughout the book, the opportunity to bespeak the benefits of religion's help are passed by or barely touched upon.

For the *Functional Psychoses and Psychoneurosis*, constituting Chapter Eight, there is a well-presented exposition of the largest groups of mental illness—simplified to a most understandable stratum.

The Ninth Chapter is a very well-written one, with easily appreciated case illustrations. In the final paragraph, the author cries out, most justifiably against the wrong balance of teaching—the almost neglect of any importance or time whatsoever to Psychiatry—the overlooking of proper understanding of Psychosomatic Medicine. Only too true is the last sentence of that Chapter, "Obviously, many patients will have to pay a penalty in

terms of short-sighted and ineffective therapy," because of the lack of sufficient time, teaching, and training given in this field.

In Chapter Ten, I like the descriptive definition and exposition of *Constitutional Psychopathic Inferiority*. This term, so greatly maligned, by some supposed authorities, is definitely in need of such understanding and clarification. Despite the protestations against its classification and use—no satisfactory substitute has been offered and there is no other place to categorize this group in our present nomenclature.

Treatment including Psychotherapy makes up Chapter Eleven: It is really a joy to see expressed in such a book the admonition regarding "shock therapies" being used only in hospitals — excepting only in out-patient clinics under carefully controlled conditions. In addition, there is the caution of careful physical examinations before treatments, including the x-ray study of the vertebrae. The author could well have pointed out the further value of the x-ray studies in discerning the general osseous condition as poor calcium content—osteoporosis, etc., so that proper preventatives could be used to lessen the severe muscle contractions and thereby save bone injury. His caution, as to the use of prefrontal leukotomy, is to be commended. The abuse of this most severe type of therapy involves definite moral principles and has been the subject of quite some medico-moral discussion.

In speaking of Psychoanalysis, the author very righteously gives "credit where credit is due" and points out sharply some of its major contributions. However, he does adroitly evade some of the controversial material, particularly the philosophy of Freud, upon which the fundamentals of Psychoanalysis are founded, which is in question, as to its moral evaluation and as to its leanings against religion as a whole and in conflict with most Christian, especially Catholic, teachings and doctrine.

One of the highlights of this book to the reviewer, is found in the definition on Page 191, of Psychotherapy. In simple, clear, concise language, he debunks the aura of mysticism, in which this therapy is shrouded. Later in this Chapter, he gives some good advice to the therapist relative to his own emotional and mental, as well as physical health.

I was disappointed and distressed, at his one sentence, dismissal of that all-important therapeutic aid for individual and general maladjustment, namely, the value of religion or spiritual aid. He states only, "Finally, I would add the ingraining of some spiritual resources, particularly needed in this age of materialism." I am sure he has found in his vast experience many, many instances of invaluable aid to be obtained from the benefits of Religious Counseling, assistance and practice!

In the Thirteenth and final Chapter, the exhortation to nurses to "have the capacity of understanding the sick person, not merely as a collection of clinical symptoms, but as an individual human being" is applicable to all types of sickness and is a clarion call for the real charity that should be the very essence of care for all those who suffer. The rest of this Chapter is full of the soundest type of advice and helpful suggestions—something that warrants many re-readings.

The Glossary is of the usual type, not too extensive, but helpful, as a guide to the less informed reader and a necessary aid to the newly initiated in the field. The figures and diagrams throughout are not too easily comprehensible and are probably more valuable in the class room, where they can be explained in more detail.

From the viewpoint of this reviewer, if the book had the few additions and suggestions, as offered above, he could and would be enthusiastic in his praise and recommendations. As it is, there is still enthusiasm, but not to quite the intensity that he would like to be aroused, nor to which the book is really entitled. However, this is but one Psychiatrist's opinion, and believe it or not, even Psychiatrists are not infallible; so, read it yourself and find out whether you agree or not.

FUNDAMENTALS OF PSYCHIATRY

5th Edition

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