Book Reviews


This is a great book! Authoritative and comprehensive, Child Psychiatry provides up-to-date coverage of all aspects of the field, including methods of assessment and treatment. The book is remarkable in the way that it integrates recent research findings so deftly into the clinical discipline of child psychiatry. It is also very well written and is one of those rare textbooks that can either be read from cover to cover or dipped into for some relevant information. The result is a clinical tour de force that will provide trainees with an excellent grounding in the specialty.

The authors’ intention is to cater both for trainees in child psychiatry and for a range of associated professions such as paediatrics, psychology, and nursing. The book works very well in its aim of being widely suitable and will be accessible to professionals from many different backgrounds. The multiple-choice questions at the end will be particularly helpful to trainees taking professional examinations.

The chapters are organised into four sequential sections. The first section covers assessment, classification, and epidemiology. All of these chapters are excellent and filled with practical tips for the clinician in training. For instance, the chapter on assessment has a variety of “how to” suggestions, including a very helpful paragraph on the indications for doing a neurological examination. The chapter on classification is a delight. In just 72 pages the authors summarise many of the key findings from research over the past 30 years, but in such a way as to make the topic immediately accessible to the reader. There are also criticisms of common fallacies about classification, and some sacred cows (such as over-veneration of operational diagnostic systems) are skilfully disposed of.

The second section deals with specific disorders and presentations. All of the main clinical problems are dealt with and there is also discussion of new diagnostic concepts such as attachment disorders. Each chapter describes clinical features, epidemiology, associated features, differential diagnosis, and treatment. These chapters are succinct and remarkably up-to-date. Indeed, on several occasions the authors make reference to studies that have not yet been published! Many of the chapters in this section contain tables and figures to help the reader through the main points. There are reading lists at the end of each chapter, which contain well-selected references both to detailed reviews of the disorder and to recent research papers.

Section three contains chapters on the major risk factors for child psychiatric disorders including brain disorders, language disorders, insecure attachment, familial influences, and peer factors. In these chapters there is rigorous debate of the relevant theoretical issues, but each is essentially pragmatic in focus and the clinical implications are never lost. The account of attachment is particularly good, but there are also very clear discussions of genetics (with a marvellous figure showing how to interpret the results of twin and adoption studies), of reading problems, and of peer popularity.

The book concludes with a splendid section on treatment. The emphasis here is very much on interventions that have been proven to be effective. Indeed, the section begins with a provocative table that lists examples of effective and ineffective treatments. Amongst the effective treatments are medication in hyperkinesis and parent training in conduct disorder. It is sobering to see that amongst the interventions that are now thought to be ineffective, or even harmful, are such old favourites as social skills training for peer relationship problems and unfocused family work for conduct disorder. I suspect that some practitioners will disagree with the authors about which treatments are or are not effective. This reviewer, however, found it heartening to see the evidence base having such a prominent place in an introductory textbook.

All in all, then, this is a splendid introduction to the specialty. It is very readable, well structured, and with excellent tables and figures. Other strengths of this book are that it is thoroughly up-to-date and organised in such a way as to make it very useful for those revising for professional examinations. Goodman and Scott have produced a book that deserves to become the standard introductory text to child psychiatry.

Richard Harrington


Judging by my postbag there is a thirst for information about the conditions variably grouped under the attention deficit or hyperactivity heading. This book is a quencher, though it will not lead to overhydration. It targets particular topics within the field and treats them in expert fashion, but within a manageable length.

Casual commentators on hyperactivity and attention deficit do not always realise the extent of the literature devoted to it. There are well over 2000 publications in the scientific literature and it is increasingly difficult to keep up with developments. That is another reason for welcoming a book such as this, which allows certain topics to be addressed at length.

Thus there are good chapters on areas that are prone to relative neglect: psychosocial factors, developmental perspectives, transcultural issues, and sex differences. These are alongside core concerns such as clinical features, epidemiology, biological aspects, and outcome. This makes for a more than a textbook; it builds a benchbook, available for the difficult questions put by students, journalists, and parents.

The editor has, of course, a mastery of her subject. Her own contributions on historical and clinical aspects reveal this. Alongside these, several chapters stand out as especially noteworthy. Heptinstall and Taylor write briefly on sex differences in a manner that is clinically helpful as well as managing to be critical about the sparse research on hyperactive girls. Van der Meere, as one might expect, offers a detailed and up-to-date discussion of attention, arguing for the central importance of abnormal response decision and organisation. Stevenson’s contribution on reading disability is intelligent and thorough. Schachar writes a superbly concise chapter on pharmacological and behavioural treatments; not, as he says, a comprehensive account of management, but a systematic and indispensable up-to-date overview.

This is a multi-author book with contributors drawn from all continents. Like others of its kind it will have taken time to assemble contributions. On occasion this shows. Some of the chapters show their age by being preoccupied with the 1980s and generally it is unusual to find references more recent than

It is now 10 years since the first edition of the Handbook appeared and the contents of this second edition reflect the ways in which understanding and approaches to autism have changed over the last decade.

First, there is far more on diagnosis and classification, with separate chapters being devoted to conditions such as Asperger syndrome, Rett’s syndrome, childhood disintegrative disorders, atypical autism, and Pervasive Developmental Disorders—Not Otherwise Specified. These chapters help to clarify diagnostic criteria for the various conditions, and describe associated cognitive and behavioural patterns, providing brief but succinct discussions of issues such as etiology, epidemiology, course, and prognosis. However, they also highlight the problems of differential diagnosis, in pointing to the overlap as well as the differences between them.

Second, a whole section is now devoted to the development of individuals with autism, with chapters spanning the age range from infancy to adulthood. As in the previous volume, there are separate chapters on the core problems associated with autism, but the section has now been expanded to include additional and emotional problems. There is also a totally new section on theoretical perspectives, which examines recent research in areas such as theory of mind, information processing, and communication impairments.

For clinicians with direct day-to-day contact with individuals with autism there is an extremely helpful and informative section on assessment. This presents detailed information to guide the clinician in choosing and evaluating the various instruments that are now available to aid diagnosis, and on the tests that can be used to assess linguistic, cognitive, and developmental functioning. There is also a chapter on behavioural assessment.

The original section on neurobiological issues has been updated to cover the enormous amount of progress that has been made in these areas over the last decade. There are detailed reviews of neurochemical, neurological, and genetic aspects, in addition to a well-balanced discussion of the various medical conditions that are (or may be) associated with autism.

As in the original volume, considerable attention is devoted to intervention issues. Whilst making it clear that there is no cure for autism, this section illustrates how appropriately designed programmes can be used to enhance language and communication skills, to ameliorate behavioural problems, and generally to help individuals with autism and their families to cope as successfully as possible. This section covers education, occupational, and residential programmes, as well as containing chapters on medication and the ever-important (but often overlooked) issue of good routine health care.

A section on Public Policy Perspectives covers a variety of different topics—including ethical issues, legal rights, educational integration, the development and implementation of the TEACCH programme and a sensitive and sensible chapter on the ways in which parents can be helped to cope when the diagnosis of autism is first made. A totally new section—entitled International Perspectives—describes philosophical, theoretical, and practical approaches to autism in various parts of the world. Again, the submissions here indicate the advances that have been made in understanding and treating autism in many countries over the last decade and how now, even in countries such as China, the condition is beginning to be recognised and some, albeit limited, services provided.

The final section, on Personal Perspectives, contains contributions from teachers, parents, and siblings and, perhaps most important in indicating how much progress has been made in this area, a chapter written by Temple Grandin, an animal psychologist, who herself has autism.

Apart from naming Temple, however, it would seem invidious to single out any one of the other authors for special mention. Each of the chapters (and there are 50 in all) is important in its own right and, no doubt as a result of painstaking and careful editorial work by Professors Cohen and Volkmar, they are remarkably coherent in style and free of unnecessary jargon. Moreover, the contents generally include information on relevant studies from different countries, rather than (as is often the case in volumes of this kind), focusing predominantly on U.S.-based research and practice. Although some overlap is almost inevitable in a volume of this size, the editors have again managed to keep this to a minimum, and a brief note on “cross-referencing” at the end of many chapters helps to indicate where additional relevant information can be found elsewhere in the book.

Weighing in at over a 1000 pages, the book is obviously not cheap. Nevertheless, like its predecessor it should prove well worth the price and continue to be a valuable source of information to both clinicians and researchers well beyond the turn of the century.

Patricia Howlin


This book is pioneering in spirit and as such I commend it. It is an account of an intensive study of five infants in vulnerable circumstances. Its aims and goals are ambitious but not clearly presented and probably not completely fulfilled. In the author’s words (at different points in the Introduction and first chapter), these are “to explore the possibilities of systematically observing infant development from the point of view of the psychoanalytic tradition; to assess the methodology as a research method; to develop a theoretical framework from the observed material and to assess its contribution to furthering understanding of infancy; and to analyse in this methodology and theoretical framework, the factors which contribute to vulnerability and ‘at riskness’ in this sample of infants”. “‘Clinical and therapeutic goal’ seems to be to see ‘the kind of baby’ whose problems can be ‘assessed, predicted and changed’.”

As a proponent of the use of the method of infant observation described by Bick (1964) in research as well as training, I admire Briggs’ bold attempts to do this in this study. He supports my own view that the detailed observation of infants has the potential to contribute to the development of new theories of infancy, in much the same way as psychoanalytically informed clinicians have developed theories from their case material. However, in this experiment he goes one step further and tries to move the method into the arena of quantitative as well as qualitative data collection. The quantification of his rich, and at times vivid, descriptions of these babies is unfortunately not subjected to reliability testing. His method is then open to criticism, of its ambition rather than anything else. For in itself the study is an exciting hypothesis-generating study, whose description suffers from a premature leap at scientific respectability. Of course, the author acknowledges these weaknesses, but I personally believe the story could have been told as
well, if not better, by sticking to his raw descriptions and innovative interpretations of what actually happened in each baby’s case. I like Briggs’ way of conceptualising some aspects of development. His concepts of “container shape” and “grip relations” are exciting and quite helpful to a point. However, there is no doubt that one’s way of looking at things influences what one sees. In this case, the author comes from the position of a strong theoretical commitment to Bion, and not surprisingly cannot take his theories much further. I say this because I was not able to see where he was taking them. Indeed I was reminded of my early attempts to read Bion’s work when I neared the end of this book and found myself facing mathematical-looking equations.

Overall I found this a difficult book to read. Its subject is exciting and the method described has great potential. If Briggs had managed to take us further towards his goal of addressing prediction and change in a practical user-friendly way, he would truly have broken new ground. As such he has given us a glimpse of some interesting possibilities, which should be explored further. Growth and risk in infancy should be read by researchers of infancy who have an interest in a naturalistic and qualitative approach to the topic. It will also be of interest to those working in the psychoanalytic tradition with parents and babies. A wider audience will find the first chapter on Theories of Infancy an interesting read.

Anne McFadyen

Reference


This is a very readable book because the authors integrate a strong feeling for children with autism and their families with a comprehensive view of this intriguing developmental disorder. Inspired by Lorna Wing’s notion “to understand what is deviant in the social phenotype of autistic children is to understand an important component of the human nature” the authors present current research on autism through the lens of normal development. The way the authors deal with the rather complex issues of the field and their clear description of research findings on the behavioural, cognitive, and biological level is impressive.

There are nine relatively short chapters in the book. In Chapter one, the concept of autism and the autistic-like condition Asperger syndrome is introduced. The following six chapters describe what is known about children with autism at different age periods and also outline the differences between normal and autistic individuals. Chapter eight covers the main lines of thinking about core deficits and causes of autism. The authors present the different approaches to autistic impairment as complementary—each theory highlights different features of the disorder. The final chapter presents interventions of various kinds. Wisely, the authors only present treatments that meet the standards of scientific research. According to my reading the volume has only one minor, although significant, error. In Chapter five (page 96) the authors mix up Picture Arrangement with Picture Completion in the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children.

This book provides very rich and useful information on autism as manifest from infancy to adulthood. It will be an excellent volume for parents and various professionals with basic knowledge in autism who want to learn more.

Stephan Ehlers


Current developments in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services require increasing involvement of child mental health clinicians and researchers in public health issues, prevention, interface with primary care (Health, Social, and Education), and particularly the implementation of preventive strategies. These two volumes are timely and fulfill all these aims. This is the American equivalent of the U.K. Health of the Nation, following national targets on “Healthy People 2000”, which set objectives for the outcomes of health status, risk reduction, and services and protection. The next target is to make “Healthy Children 2010” a priority for the United States. The objectives focus primarily on five topic areas: quality school health education, school readiness, maternal and infant health, primary care providers, and national and local policies. The two volumes follow previous work (volumes 6 and 7) on Primary prevention practices and Primary prevention work. The authors represent a broad range of clinical and research experience, predominantly from psychology, but also from Public Health, Education, Health Policy, Social Work, and Social Policy.

Volume 8 (Enhancing children’s wellness) attempts to summarise latest research and theories on family, school, and community prevention and health promotion programmes for children. Interventions include both primary (early-age) and secondary (high-risk) prevention programmes. High-risk groups comprise substance abuse, sexual behaviour/sexually transmitted diseases, delinquency/violence, depression/self-harm, and school performance.

Volume 9 (Establishing preventive services) describes social care (e.g. Family Support), Child Mental Health Services, and school-based interventions. Interesting concepts and definitions are introduced and discussed. For example, three core roles for school mental health professionals are identified, i.e. primary prevention, early detection/secondary prevention for children at risk, and diagnosis/treatment for children with serious problems. One chapter author suggests that schools shift from being “problem containers” to “skill enhancers”. Another interesting notion is that of a “school-based health centre”, in order to improve access to health care. Chapter 7 provides a set of comprehensive guidelines for evaluation of prevention programmes. The next chapter explores reasons why many school-based programmes fail to achieve their goals. The book concludes with a list of recommendations.

The two volumes will be of much interest to clinicians, teachers, researchers, and policy makers in the broad field of primary and secondary prevention of child mental health and related problems.

Panos Vostanis


This book is intended for “all those professionals whose work brings them into contact with children with learning difficulties, but who do not always have the opportunity to share their expertise with others”. This description puzzled me as, looking at the list of contributors (13 in all), it seemed that these are
sharing their expertise with the reader, rather than the other way round.

"Share their expertise" they certainly do—on a wide-ranging number of topics. There are chapters that deal with issues in learning disability and principles of intervention. Others, the majority, deal with specific areas such as play, communication, sensory reinforcement, social skills training, occupational therapy, and drama and music. There is a chapter on autism and Asperger syndrome and one on applying the principles of the Code of Practice to pupils with specific learning difficulties/dyslexia. Many chapters contain much up-to-date information, useful guidelines, and suggestions for practice and recording. All will be of value for practitioners wishing to brush up on their knowledge and skills.

On a purely personal scale, I would single out the chapter on play, by Dorothy Jeffree, in which the old magic works again. I would also recommend that on sensory reinforcement by Karen Bunning. She gives an account of various types of sensory stimulation, a rationale for sensory-based intervention, and step-by-step planning for intervention, coupled with examples of recording sheets.

The final chapter by Christopher Robertson does not hesitate to confront difficult issues in the education of children and young people. These include: needs, such as physical development and well-being, which are not readily incorporated within a National Curriculum framework; simplistic notions of inclusive education based solely on ideologically derived egalitarian perspectives; and the need to develop further understanding of profound complexities of need.

The contents certainly illustrate a diversity of issues, techniques, and approaches available when working with children with learning difficulties. The book should provide stimulus and inspiration, not only for professionals but for all who wish to learn more about recent and relevant developments. What it does not do is live up to its subtitle—A collaborative approach to their [children’s] education and management. Each chapter stands largely on its own. There is little if any, mention of collaboration between professionals in different spheres, of parent–professional collaboration or pupil–teacher collaboration.

There are also, surprisingly, only 11 mentions of the National Curriculum in a book of 318 pages. Not one of these 11 mentions extends beyond a page and 5 are contained in the chapter on dyslexia. While welcoming information on theory and its link with practice, most teachers would probably like to know more about the relationship of skills and activities to the key stages of the National Curriculum.

Despite these misgivings, I found it a stimulating and informative book. I would recommend it to all involved with children with learning difficulties.

Beryl Smith


This is the latest in the International Review of Child Neurology series. In the foreword, neurofibromatosis is described as "at the crossroad of diverse areas of medicine, including cancer biology and cognitive neuroscience", and the writer of the foreword goes on to say that what is learned about this relatively rare condition will therefore be likely to increase "our understanding of the pathogenesis of much more common conditions that affect the general population".

The book is the product of clinical research from the Sydney Neurofibromatosis Clinic and is constructed of seven chapters. The introduction is (rather strangely) listed as Chapter 1. It is followed by two chapters covering molecular biology (Chapter 2) and clinical manifestations seen in the first 200 patients assessed in their clinic (Chapter 3). Chapters 4 and 5 comprise a section on cognitive aspects of Neurofibromatosis Type 1 (NF1): academic performance and cognitive function (Chapter 4) and a search for correlation between cognitive deficits and MRI T2 abnormalities (Chapter 5). Chapter 6 focuses on the assessment and management of optic gliomas and the last chapter discusses MRI as a diagnostic tool in NF1.

North's style of writing is clear and concise and allows valuable insight into the topics discussed. In fact, the book has the basic feel of an essential textbook, not dissimilar to, for example, Gomez's book on tuberous sclerosis, a sister phacomatosis of NF1. In spite of the overall excellent impression, however, the book, does not feel quite balanced. I would not hesitate to agree with the author concerning the interest of cognitive neuropsychology and MRI in the disorder, but perhaps the reader would have felt more informed by a slightly broader view of NF1, including, for example, more electrophysiology, neuropathology, or other physical, neurological, and psychiatric problems associated with the disorder.

The fact that the individual chapters read like discreet essays or papers leads to a sense of isolation between chapters. Also, had the author included more clear-cut suggestions for future research or thoughts on generalisability to other, more common disorders, North would have more powerfully communicated her fascinating clinical and molecular data and research hypothesis derived from the dedicated work of the Sydney Neurofibromatosis Clinic.

The book nevertheless gives an excellent impression of an intriguing disorder which, like tuberous sclerosis, may well become a vehicle towards an improved understanding of the unanswered questions about pathogenesis and management of tumours, cognitive deficits, and neuropsychiatric abnormalities.

Petrus de Vries

Reference


These days, it often seems that the more enticing the title of a book, the less substance it proves to contain. I certainly did not find that with Richardson and Koller’s text—which will surely become a classic of its kind. For the “twenty-two years” in question are the first 22 years in the lives of young people affected by mental retardation. A large-scale naturalistic prospective follow-up study is described, in which we read of the progress of the developmental disabilities, health problems, and other aspects of life situation of this closely studied cohort.

Stephen Richardson in particular has already received great acclaim for his serial publications on this cohort study. Here, for the first time, we see the work brought together in a single volume, re-written in an amenable form. Personally, I will be recommending this one not only to clinicians, but also to service managers and commissioners involved in the lives of people with learning disabilities. The text provides us with a vivid and immediate picture of the multiple problems encountered by young people with learning disabilities, in a uniquely clear fashion.

Gregory O’Brien