

Reviews

Mindfulness for Health: A Practical Guide to Relieving Pain, Reducing Stress and Restoring Wellbeing

Vidyamala Burch and Danny Penman
Piatkus, 2013, £12.50, pb, 288 pp.
ISBN: 9780749959241

This book leads the reader through a journey of how to deal with suffering from bodily symptoms-related illness and injury. It clearly describes the differences between primary suffering due to injury and secondary suffering largely created within the mind through learnt views, behaviours and fears the person has experienced in their life or through their illness. It then gently describes how, by engaging with the secondary suffering, much of the suffering can be relieved or brought down to the primary pain and suffering which is generally easier to manage within traditional medicine. The book also points out that traditional medical models of pain often miss secondary suffering, whereas traditional therapies often fail to address secondary suffering or can even make it worse. It is to the great credit of authors that they deal with this sensitive issue with compassion and empathy.

The book then turns into a step-by-step practical guide on how to approach secondary pain and suffering. The guide is complete with audio recordings of practices that the reader can easily follow and this will not require excessive time. Real-life experiences of people who were helped by following this guide are included.

The problem of dealing with pain and suffering is as old as humanity and the readers would have come across many hopes and promises made by medicine, alternative medicine and the spiritual sector among others. This book outlines not only anecdotal evidence in the form of testimonies from people engaging in mindfulness but also benefits from a wealth of research which it refers to.

As a doctor having used mindfulness successfully to manage my own pain and suffering from illness, I found reading this book was somewhat challenging, as it would be to many other readers. However, I have not yet read a book on mindfulness so sensitive and gentle with the issue of pain and suffering as this one.

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Bipolar Disorder

Stephen M. Strakowski
Oxford University Press USA, 2014, £22.99, pb, 128 pp.
ISBN: 9780199995684

Bipolar Disorder is a pocket-sized book whose target audience is any member of the multidisciplinary team involved in looking after a patient with bipolar disorder.

It begins with an interesting glimpse into the history of bipolar disorder and how the illness was documented in biblical texts as early as 1000 BC. Its key themes include the diagnosis of bipolar disorder, epidemiology, comorbidities, neurophysiology, genetics, psychopharmacological and non-psychopharmacological management, and managing 'special' populations with bipolar disorder (e.g. children, pregnant women).

The text is easy to read and key points are excellently summarised in boxes throughout. The book fulfils its aims (stated in the blurb) to a very high standard, covering all important areas of bipolar disorder in a way that is succinct and aids retention of knowledge. Although not fully comprehensive, it helpfully lists references after each chapter to guide the reader to further reading around the topic.

One of the main strengths of the book is its effective presentation of information, using a combination of prose, bullet points and diagrams to cater to the needs of a variety of learners. The chapter entitled 'A programmatic approach to treatment' takes readers through a thorough management plan, making the whole process more holistic – this is something I will most certainly take from the book and apply to the management of all my patients, regardless of their illness.

The only limitation is, perhaps inevitably, its emphasis on US Food and Drug Administration-approved medications in its pharmacological management chapter, which may not be as relevant to psychiatrists practising in countries other than the USA. The book, however, does its best to incorporate global knowledge of bipolar illness, with references to a variety of countries.

I would wholeheartedly recommend this guide to anyone interested in learning more about bipolar disorder or who simply requires a revision of the key topics surrounding the illness.

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