

Book Review

Laboratory medicine in psychiatry and behavioural science (second edition)

by Sandra A. Jacobson, American Psychiatric Association Publishing, 2023

Laboratory Medicine in Psychiatry and Behavioural Science (Second Edition) is a book you can judge by its cover. It is 639 pages of densely packed knowledge about all fields of laboratory medicine – bedside tests, blood sciences, imaging, neuroconduction studies, etc. – made as succinct and clinically relevant as possible for clinical psychiatry. Reading this book was a stark reminder of how much I have forgotten about laboratory medicine since medical school. Put another way, it was only on reading this book that I realised how vital it is to have a reference manual for this topic. That realisation raised the questions at the centre of this brief review: Do I need a reference manual for laboratory medicine? And if so, is this the reference book I should use? With those questions in mind, we will look at the strengths and weaknesses of this book, as well as giving a summary of its structure and how to use it.

Some of the book's strengths are apparent immediately from the introduction. This is a book written by a psychiatrist familiar with clinical practice, for psychiatrists practicing clinically. The author is well aware of how the book will be used and that most people who buy this book will not be using it as bedtime reading. While the introduction does not go so far as to describe the book as a reference manual, it does explain how the book's structure easily lends itself to use as a reference manual. The introduction briefly touches on the importance of judicious use of laboratory tests and what may be considered a reasonable initial work-up for a psychiatry inpatient.

The book is well-organised and easy to use. It is divided into three chapters, devoted to "Laboratory Tests", "Diseases and Conditions", and "Psychotropic Medications: Laboratory Screening and Monitoring" respectively. Each chapter's entries are arranged alphabetically, from let's say "Adrenocorticotropic Hormone Testing" to "White Blood Cell Differentials". What I found helpful was that entries may be duplicated to an extent to allow for ease of use as a reference manual. For instance, alanine transferase is discussed as its own section, as well as being

referenced in the section on liver function tests. Each section is also finished with a cross-reference box to give you related information.

The content of the book is *all* clinically relevant and as succinct as possible. This book avoids the failures of many so-called clinical textbooks, which contain lengthy discussions about technical details on how laboratory tests are carried out etc. It also largely limits its scope to widely available tests, as opposed to research grade tests less likely to be useful in the clinical day to day. The entry on each topic is only as much information as would be needed. Each entry has a table layout with clear sections. In the first and longest chapter "Laboratory tests," the table contains: a brief background explanation of the test, immediately followed by its relevance to psychiatry. Within a few paragraphs of every entry, we are aware of the information's clinical relevance. The entries on laboratory tests also contain any preparation a patient may need for the test to be carried out, as well as reference ranges, critical values, indications, significance of raised or lower values and possible interfering factors.

So, should you buy this book? This book knows its purpose and carries it out well. It is written by a clinician for clinicians. It is as succinct as possible, with enough detail to guide the next steps in clinical management. It is well-organized and easy to use. In certain areas, particularly around texts which require complex interpretation, such as ECGs or imaging, its content may have to be supplemented by other sources. This book has very few weaknesses. At times its scope is so broad that it can only touch on certain topics, which require a bit more comprehensive exploration for clinical use. This is particularly evident in its guide to reading ECGs and CT brain scans.

I think it's a lovely book, and prefer to have a succinct clinical reference manual over a less focused broader text. After reading it, I am convinced of the necessity of having a reference manual for laboratory medicine. I also prefer to have a book as opposed to an online resource. I think this book would be justified in its place beside a copy of "The Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines" and the "British National Formulary" as a necessary reference manual in any psychiatrist's office. If your preference is to have a physical reference manual, you will not go far wrong with *Laboratory Medicine in Psychiatry and Behavioural Science*.

Competing interests. The author has no competing interests to declare.

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