

# Kaplan & Sadock's Pocket Handbook of Clinical Psychiatry, 3rd Edition

Authors: Sadock BJ, Sadock VA.

Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, Philadelphia, USA, 2001.

US\$49.95; pp: 479; ISBN: 0-7817-2532-1.

As the authors emphasise, the *Pocket Handbook of Clinical Psychiatry* is not meant to be a substitute for a major textbook of psychiatry. Rather, it aims to serve as an easily accessible guide for medical students, psychiatric residents, and psychiatrists to consult in their clinical work. Thus, one would expect features to suit this purpose, being brief, concise, clinically oriented, and convenient to use. Is it so?

The book is written in note form with clear headings and points. Useful information and clinical tips are tabulated for easy reference. There are 28 chapters. The first 3 chapters are general introductions covering history taking, mental state examination, psychopathology, and classification of mental disorders. Mental phenomena that relate to signs and symptoms are listed in alphabetical order followed by their definitions. The list is by no means complete but is comprehensive enough for a quick reference, which will inevitably be most welcomed by medical students who like to recite definitions without necessarily understanding what they really mean. The part on clinical assessment does highlight important features and summarises them in tables, which are abundantly utilised in other parts of the handbook as well. Of particular interest is a table summarising special interview situations, such as 'seductive patients', 'patients who lie', and 'patients from different cultures and backgrounds', which may alert novices and offer them advice on how to deal with the situation.

The other chapters are mainly arranged according to diagnostic categories in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th edition*. Concise summaries covering essential aspects of aetiology, epidemiology, clinical features, and treatment for a range of psychiatric disorders are given. They include delirium, dementia, mental disorders due to a general medical condition, alcohol-related and substance-related disorders, schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders, mood disorders, anxiety disorders, somatoform and factitious disorders, dissociative disorders, sexual dysfunction and paraphilias, eating disorders, sleep disorders, impulse-control disorders, and personality disorders. Information is given in the following format: definition, epidemiology, aetiology, diagnosis, signs and symptoms, laboratory tests, differential diagnosis, course and prognosis, and treatment. Everything is mentioned briefly but concisely. It is assumed that the readers have already understood the concepts and the terms are simply reminders. Otherwise, referral should be made to the parent text *Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry* edited by the same authors.

There are also overviews of management, including psychotherapy, psychopharmacology, laboratory tests, and brain imaging. The chapter on psychopharmacology is especially worth mentioning, as it includes updated information on new antidepressants, new antipsychotics/serotonin-dopamine antagonists, and the cholinesterase inhibitors. Not only are the pharmacological actions, side effects, drug interactions, and clinical guidelines provided but one can also 'see' the drugs as there is a 5-page guide containing colour reproductions of commonly prescribed psychotherapeutic drugs. There is a separate chapter on medication-induced movement disorders, which covers neuroleptic-induced parkinsonism, acute dystonia, acute akathisia, tardive dyskinesia, neuroleptic malignant syndrome, and postural tremor. Each disorder is described in detail and the Abnormal Involuntary Movement Scale examination procedure is also included, which may help to remind medical students and trainees who often overlook these common side effects.

There are also several chapters covering different subspecialties such as child and adolescent psychiatry, geriatric psychiatry, psychosomatic medicine, and forensic aspects of psychiatry. This arrangement, however, causes considerable overlap within the chapters and may be the biggest drawback to the book. For instance, there is a chapter on delirium, dementia, and other cognitive disorders, classified in the diagnostic category, but information on dementia is also given in the chapter on geriatric psychiatry. Another example is that there is a chapter on psychosomatic medicine/consultation liaison psychiatry but relevant aspects are only highlighted in the chapter. The details are scattered throughout the other parts of the book. If one looks at the table summarising the common consultation-liaison problems, one will find 'suicide attempt or threat', 'disorientation', and 'non-compliance or refusal to consent to procedure', but the details of how to deal with these problems are found in different chapters. The assessment and management of suicidal patients are found in the chapter on suicide, and violent and other psychiatric emergencies. Delirium is described in detail in the chapter on delirium, dementia, and cognitive disorders. Issues on consent are discussed in the chapter on legal and ethical issues. As a pocket reference, this layout may cause considerable confusion. The commonest way of using a handbook is to look for a subject in the index, but this handbook is not particularly user-friendly as some of the relevant pages are not shown under a particular subject in the index. For

instance, when looking for 'vascular dementia' only the page numbers on vascular dementia in the elderly are shown and the general information for vascular dementia in the other chapters is not indexed. This means that unless one is familiar with the layout of the handbook as a whole, one is unlikely to get all the information that is provided for a particular topic.

To answer the initial question of whether this handbook serves its purpose, we can thus conclude that it satisfies 3 of the 4 features – concise, brief, and clinically oriented. However, as a pocket reference, it lacks the convenience and seems to be more of an abridged version of the *Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry* edited by the same authors. Despite the authors' emphasis that this is not a

textbook, it has to be read thoroughly as a textbook before one can use it as a day-to-day clinical guide. Indeed, the authors never forget to remind the readers to look up the more detailed discussion in the full textbook by giving the cross-reference page numbers. For medical students or junior trainees, this handbook may be useful for revision for examinations and is not too overwhelming.

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## Critical Appraisal of Medical Literature

*Editor: Marchevsky D.*

*Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, New York, USA, 2000.*

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There has been an enormous number of publications on medical statistics and critical appraisal in recent years. This is in keeping with the recent trend in the application of evidence-based medicine (EBM) in clinical practice and clinical audit, as well as professional examination.

We are often confused by the number of EBM textbooks that are written by people from different professional backgrounds. To most psychiatrists, books geared towards polishing critical appraisal skills that are sufficient for examination and continuous self education purposes, perhaps written by psychiatrists, would be most relevant and appealing. Existing books on EBM usually adopt various approaches. Some of them start from research questions, research methodology, and hypothesis testing while some adopt the 'top-down' approach by appraising the study results yielded by different research methodologies. This book, however, is written by a psychiatrist who adopts both approaches.

The book is divided into 3 parts. Part I is devoted to the discussion of the basic concepts of EBM, in terms of probability, variable and measurement, distribution, hypothesis testing, research methodology, bias, and errors as well as epidemiology. Part II focuses on the approaches to critical appraisal of a wide range of research papers. Part III deals with the more sophisticated statistical concepts of multivariate analysis and non-parametric tests.

All topics are organised into short, concise chapters that can be read in less than 15 minutes. The theories are illustrated both conceptually and mathematically and narrated in lucid English. The author has included summaries in note form at the end of each chapter that are comprehensive yet concise enough to allow one to skip the

main text if little time is available for reading. This is particularly important for examination candidates who look for materials to help with multiple choice examinations and short questions.

Part II of this book is the most relevant section to the critical review paper of the Member of the Royal College of Psychiatry (MRCPsych) Part II Examination. The section starts with a few chapters giving the general framework of critical appraisal technique, which is then consistently applied to the appraisal of different research designs in the subsequent chapters.

This section encompasses papers on treatment, diagnosis, aetiology, literature review and meta-analysis, audit, clinical guidelines, and qualitative research. Checklists of items to consider in appraising different research methodologies are compiled in a summary chapter at the end of Part II providing a quick tool of reference.

Part III endeavours to cover the various statistical techniques, including the z-test, t-test, analysis of variance, non-parametric tests, correlation, regression and prediction, and multivariate analysis. The coverage is adequate for most clinicians and potential MRCPsych examination candidates. On the other hand, in-depth illustrations of the mathematical steps and tabulation processes of statistical analysis are lacking, which makes it difficult for beginners to follow. The author has, however, made it quite clear that it was not his aim to teach the computational technique in-depth, hence this part of the book cannot replace standard statistical textbooks and manuals.

In general, this book serves to reach the general audience with little or no background in research methodology and EBM. It is of great relevance to MRCPsych examination

candidates for a quick grasp of the essential approaches to critical appraisal. However, exercises for taking the Membership examination are lacking. Therefore, examination-oriented readers might need to refer to other exercise books on critical appraisal.

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## Kaplan & Sadock's Synopsis of Psychiatry, 8th Edition, and Study Guide and Self-Examination Review, CD-ROM, 6th Edition

*Editors: Kaplan HJ, Sadock BJ*  
*Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, Philadelphia, USA, 2000.*  
*US\$125.00; ISBN: 0-7817-2142-5.*

E-books have become more popular recently. Their compact size, the ease with which you can carry them anywhere, and their environmentally friendly nature are unbeatable features. Most importantly, you can search for a term or subject much more quickly than in traditional books. CD-ROM versions of major textbooks may be considered precursors of today's e-books. If you are accustomed to work or study in front of a computer, they are more convenient than references on the shelf.

The Synopsis is an abridged version of a typical American psychiatric textbook, and its content and format are similar to many others, with too much emphasis on the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th edition*, classification as the backbone of the text and a weakness in its coverage of psychopathology. Sections on foundation sciences in psychiatry such as psychosocial sciences and neurosciences are readable and concise. The text also contains a number of comprehensive tables that are helpful for quick revision.

The CD-ROM is not designed solely as a reference piece. Chapters can be manipulated to suit individual readers, as the programme has functions that allow readers to highlight text in multiple colours, add book marks, and type notes anywhere in the text. Readers can also copy and paste selected content to create revision notes in Word format. For teaching purposes, it is easy to copy the figures, tables, and images to your PowerPoint presentations, and this is permitted within the framework stated in the license agreement.

On first receiving this CD-ROM, however, I questioned the need for another digital book in this well-known psychiatric series, since the *Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry* has already been published in CD-ROM version. This CD-ROM, however, includes another important resource, namely the *Study Guide and Self-examination*

*Review*. It will be welcomed by trainees who have to sit for membership examination abroad — a notebook computer and a CD-ROM will be invaluable tools.

The Study Guide is the most interesting part of the entire CD-ROM. It contains 1615 questions formatted according to the United States Medical Licensing Examination. Questions cover 6 sections, including the foundations of psychiatry, clinical disorders, psychiatric treatment, child and adolescent psychiatry, special issues, and a continuing medical education test.

These questions are best used as a review tool rather than for primary study prior to the examination for Member of the Royal College of Psychiatry as they are relatively easy. Explanations of both right and wrong answers are provided for each question, with the cross-referenced chapters of the Synopsis just a mouse click away. The programme also features a scoring record to track your study. Although the questions are easy, they are distilled from the text to highlight the practical aspects of clinical psychiatry.

In summary, the CD-ROM versions of the Synopsis and Review may be more useful than the hard copy of these books if you plan to utilise the special features. However, if you are not a trainee with an examination ahead, you might consider buying a CD-ROM version of the *Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry* instead. Finally, there are some bugs in the programme if you are using the Chinese version of the Windows 98 platform to run this CD-ROM.

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