

# Clinical Handbook of Psychotropic Drugs

*Editors: Kalyna Z Bezchlibnyk-Butler, J Joel Jeffries  
Hogrefe & Huber, Cambridge, 2004  
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The *Clinical Handbook of Psychotropic Drugs* is a resource book that offers guidance on the use of psychotropic medication. It is more than a psychotropic drug directory as it covers the basic pharmacology of individual drug groups that helps one to understand the effect and side-effect profiles of psychotropic drugs, as well as their interactions with other medications. The book lists the published literature pertaining to the drugs, including basic science data, controlled clinical trials, and case reports, as well as noting clinical experience to provide concise but comprehensive information on the evidence for indications and effectiveness of these agents.

The approach of the book is practical. The chapters are organised according to the clinical application of the medication — antidepressants, antipsychotics, agents for treating extrapyramidal side effects, anxiolytic agents, hypnotics/sedatives, mood stabilisers, drugs for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), drugs of abuse, drugs for treatment of substance use disorder, and antidementia agents. Charts and tables are used to make the information easily accessible by clinicians. The charts are used to list the drug interactions in each chapter, to show the drug's effects on neurotransmitters/receptors, and to compare the side-effect profiles between psychotropics within a group, for example atypical neuroleptics and newer antidepressants. This information helps clinicians to map the use of a psychotropic agent for an individual patient according to his/her clinical presentation, for example employing an atypical agent with 5-hydroxytryptamine 1 blockade may be more effective for reducing depression, anxiety, or aggressive symptoms in a psychotic patient. On the other hand, the book also provides precautions for consideration before the drug is used in different groups of patients according to their age and sex. Remedies are suggested to manage toxicity by overdose and to relieve the side effects caused by a psychotropic medication, for example, use of sodium chloride to help reduce orthostatic hypotension caused by trazodone. There are also comments that remind readers of the approach for stopping treatment with psychotropic medication to minimise the withdrawal symptoms.

The chapter on antidepressants is most extensive, especially for newest antidepressants where individual sections cover selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, norepinephrine dopamine reuptake inhibitors, selective serotonin norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors, serotonin-2 antagonists/reuptake inhibitors, and noradrenergic/specific serotonergic antidepressants. This enables clinicians to obtain information on the pharmacological properties of these newer types of antidepressants, which may appear confusing, especially for

a non-psychiatrist. The table on the frequency of adverse reaction compares the percentage of different side effects for more than 20 older and newer antidepressants. This appeals to me, as individual variations in the side effect profile, albeit small, is a determining factor for choosing a drug for an elderly patient. There is a section that describes the clinical efficacy of different antidepressant augmentation strategies, which aids the management of more resistant patients.

Unlike the chapter for antidepressants, the chapter for antipsychotics describes the indications and application of all atypical antipsychotic medications in one section, while the individual differences in pharmacology and side effects are shown in charts and tables.

Three chapters are offered to outline the use of electroconvulsive therapy, bright light therapy, and repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation. The reasons for including them in a psychotropic handbook are obscure. It may be because they are often used in conjunction with psychotropic medications for the management of mental illness. This part includes a section that plots the interaction of psychotropic drugs with physical treatment, for which information may not be otherwise available in a textbook.

There is an interesting chapter that describes some newly emerged and yet unapproved treatments for psychiatric disorders. Based on biochemical theories of the aetiology of specific psychiatric disorders, these drugs may help to ameliorate the neurotransmitter imbalance that underlies the disorders. These include hormonal treatment/steroid biosynthesis inhibitors for depression, serotonin antagonists for schizophrenia and adrenergic agents for ADHD. The authors advise that this unapproved treatment should only be prescribed for patients who are highly resistant to conventional therapies.

The last part of the book provides patient information sheets on the use of different drug categories. Although they may not be directly applicable for Chinese patients, these sheets provide a useful framework for the education and counselling for Chinese patients. The sheets inform about what symptoms will be helped by the medication and how quickly it will start working, how long the drug should be taken, what drugs are available, the side effects, and how to manage the side effects. They also provide reminders of the precautions that a patient should take while he/she is on medication.

To conclude, this handbook equips a clinician with the most important and updated information on drug treatment for psychiatric illness. There is a separate handbook written for children and adolescents from the same publisher. It is

worthwhile to keep a copy on your desktop. However, it would be even better and more user-friendly if this drug information was available for downloading to a handheld device as the volume of the book precludes it being carried during daily clinical work.

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## Clinical Handbook of Psychotropic Drugs for Children and Adolescents

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The use of psychotropic medications for children and adolescents is often based upon their efficacy in adults because few controlled studies for this younger age group have been reported. However, research data are becoming increasingly available, and it is crucial that clinicians keep up with the findings.

This attractive looking handbook provides a quick up-to-date practical guide to a range of psychotropic drugs commonly used for children and adolescents with psychiatric disorders. As a reference source for clinicians, the first section of the book discusses the use of stimulants and non-stimulants for attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, antidepressants, antipsychotics, anxiolytics, hypnotics, and mood stabilisers. For each class of drugs, there is a comprehensive list of information, including the approved and off-label indications for their use, basic pharmacology, product availability, dosing regimen, pharmacokinetics, adverse effects, precautions, toxicity, use in pregnancy, drug interactions, and mechanisms of action. Where available, monograph statements and evidence from open and double-blind studies are included. This information is clearly presented. Data comparing the different drugs within a class are concisely tabulated, providing clinicians with easy access to some important and relevant information about alternative medications. This section includes discussion about augmentation strategies. An additional feature is the general advice on the care of children and adolescents taking these medications, provided under the heading Nursing Implications, which is sensible and practical.

The second section of the book gives an overview of some of the substances that are commonly abused such as stimulants, hallucinogens, alcohol, opiates, inhalants, gamma-hydroxybutyrate, and hypnotics. The pharmacologi-

cal and psychiatric effects, drug interactions, and immediate management strategies are outlined.

To keep clinicians up-to-date about herbal products, there is a short 4-page section that focuses on some of these compounds such as ginkgo biloba, inositol, melatonin, omega 3 fatty acids, St John's wort, and valerian. The evidence for the effectiveness and the types of evidence available are highlighted. This book cautions that very few of these products have undergone stringent research methods, and there is a lack of conclusive evidence for their effectiveness.

The last section of the book is a set of information sheets that are intended for clinicians to pass on to the patients and their caregivers. Practical information for each of the drugs described in the book is provided. The name of the drug, how it should be taken, side effects, drug interactions and precautions are included. The aims of this section according to the editors are to "*enhance compliance, improve efficacy, and enhance safety*". Having the material presented in a written format is definitely a useful adjunct and reinforcement to the information clinicians should explain during the consultation. However, I personally find some of the information sheets too verbose, and adolescents or caregivers who are less well educated may find this an effort to absorb.

All in all, I have enjoyed this book. It is a useful guide for busy clinicians and one that puts pharmacotherapy for child and adolescent psychiatry into context.

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