

Computers in Psychiatry

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Perhaps psychiatrists are not expected to be very keen on computers as they are supposed to prefer the human mind to semi-conductor central processors. However, the hard fact is that psychiatrists are given no choice but to equip themselves with a decent competence in computers, as computers are integral to the practice of psychiatry. This is why this book is important.

This multi-authored book, published by the Royal College of Psychiatrists, thoughtfully provides busy psychiatrists with a tailor-made 'knowledge kit' that includes everything a psychiatrist should know about computers, with each section in a manageable size. There are 15 chapters in the book. They can be grossly classified into 5 parts. The first part discusses the basics of the computer, and includes both hardware and software. Practical advice is given on the components to be concerned with when buying a computer.

The second part shows how to use various computer programmes, including word processing (Microsoft® Word), presentation software (Microsoft® PowerPoint), databases (Microsoft® Excel and OpenOffice Calc [OpenOffice.org]), statistics programmes (the R statistical package), and reference management software (Reference Manager® and EndNote®), to support the busy professional psychiatrist.

Useful tools of each of these programmes are highlighted and described in detail, like cooking according to the recipes of a cookery book. The chapters on statistical programmes and reference management would be particularly useful to senior trainees preparing for the Fellowship Part III examination. Nonetheless, these chapters would be even more user-friendly if supplemented by practice files in a disc.

The third part deals with telecommunications and includes mobile computing (personal digital assistants

and smart-phones), internet and e-mail. These are not new concepts, but not everyone is able to fully utilise the functions of these technologies. For example, there are a number of techniques to help reduce the number of irrelevant results when searching for websites on internet search engines using keywords.

Ignorance of computers not only makes a psychiatrist less efficient, but also poses hazards. The fourth part of this book is therefore the most important part. There is a chapter on legal issues pertaining to the use of information technology within psychiatry, including confidentiality, intellectual property, and defamation. This chapter is written by a barrister specialising in information technology law. Another chapter is about data security; potential security vulnerabilities are pointed out with solutions provided. Busy readers can leave those chapters that do not interest them for later, but should read these 2 chapters.

The last part concerns clinical information systems and the future development of computer application in psychiatry. Psychiatrists who are interested in computers might have read the book *Concise Guide to Computers in Clinical Psychiatry* published by American Psychiatric Publishing in 2002. In comparison, *Computers in Psychiatry* is far superior in the depth of knowledge covered, especially for the parts on software application and legal issues in psychiatry. It is recommended for psychiatrists of all grades.

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