

# Mindreadings: Literature and Psychiatry

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During the last few decades, doctors have begun to focus not only on evidence-based medicine, but also to explore how medical ethics, medical sociology, and the arts in general interplay with medicine. There is increasing understanding that the bioscientific model has its limitations and tends to oversimplify our world.

*Mindreadings: Literature and Psychiatry*, published by the Royal College of Psychiatrists in 2009, is a timely contribution that aims to integrate the arts with psychiatry. It explores the role of literature in examining, clarifying, and defining human emotions, behaviours, and thoughts. Eight of this book's chapters have been published in the journal *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment* while 3 others were written specifically for this book.

This multi-author book examines the benefits of reading literature and the roles of literature in medical education. It also examines the roles of autobiography, fiction, poetry, and letters in psychiatry. The last 5 chapters of the book examine a range of topics including addictions, dementia, intellectual disability, and autism.

The book has been written primarily for psychiatrists but the clarity of language and absence of jargon make it comprehensible for any audience with background knowledge of psychiatry. Throughout, the various authors have used many examples to answer one essential question: how reading literature helps us to be better doctors. As psychiatrists, we are trained to assess our patients using objective diagnostic criteria and to practise evidence-based medicine. One of the authors reminds us that "*one central*

*gift it (literature) can give to those with a scientific training is that, there are ways of understanding that cannot be tested by multiple-choice questions because literature is not reductive. It is the role of literature to observe that the world as we experience it is irreducibly complex.*" It thus wittily points out the limitations of using a purely scientific approach to understanding patients.

In one of the chapters, the author stresses that reading is no substitute for experience. Nonetheless, by developing your interpretive skills through reading, one can enrich one's thoughts and language and develop greater empathy. The book's main contributor tells us: "*it gives us the opportunity to stand back from that world, to contemplate it, before once again immersing ourselves in it, for better or worse.*" Sometimes familiarity traps us and our creativity gradually stagnates. Reading and gaining new inspiration will awaken our passion and energy once more.

This book is a comprehensive introduction to psychiatry-related literature. It is well written and is of a manageable size. It provides useful reading for all mental health professionals who are eager to embark on a journey of exploration of the inner world.

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