

Book Reviews

Michael H. Ebert, M.D., Editor

Prozac and the New Antidepressants, revised ed.: What You Need to Know About Prozac, Zoloft, Paxil, Luvox, Wellbutrin, Effexor, Serzone, Vestra, Celexa, St. John's Wort, and Others

by William S. Appleton, M.D. A Plume Book, published by Penguin Putnam, Inc., New York, N.Y., 2000, 236 pages, \$13.95 (paper).

The lay public has a tremendous amount of interest and curiosity about depression and the "new" antidepressants, such as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs). People gather information from friends, relatives, and coworkers and from television, newspapers, and popular magazines. A patient's chief complaint in a new psychiatric evaluation is sometimes, "Do I need to be treated with an SSRI?" All psychiatrists find themselves, for better or worse, making an effort to educate patients about the treatment of depression and the use of the new antidepressant drugs. In this context of public curiosity and media attention, it is surprising how few good monographs exist on the subject for a lay audience.

This volume is certainly one of the best that is available. This 2000 edition is a revision of the original 1997 volume. Dr. William Appleton is a respected and long-standing faculty member at Harvard Medical School. He writes in an interesting, engaging, and clear style. He intersperses clinical vignettes with pharmacologic facts. Although the book is easy to read, it is actually quite dense with facts about antidepressant drugs, their pharmacology, and how they are used in clinical practice.

The book begins with an excellent discussion of the symptoms of depression—hidden and overt—and the logic behind the classification of different types of depression. The heart of the book is a detailed exposition of the second and third generation of antidepressant drugs. Particular attention is given to the family of SSRIs and antidepressants with novel or unknown mechanisms of action. An interesting chapter on natural and herbal treatments lays out fact and fiction regarding these popular pharmacologic treatments that are readily available to the public without the necessity of seeing a physician.

Like other examples of excellent nonfiction writing about science and medicine, Dr. Appleton's book can be read and appreciated at many levels of knowledge and sophistication. It is useful for the physician and other health professionals as a short reference about SSRIs. Appropriate dosages, side effects, and history of the development of specific agents are all accurately covered. It is useful as a reference for a lay person who is or knows someone who is being treated with antidepressant medication. The book is of interest for anyone who wants to learn about this particular success story of pharmacologic therapeutics. Thus, the book is useful to have in the office, one copy or

perhaps two, to recommend or loan to a patient, a trainee, or a colleague. That is why my copies sit on the bookshelf in my office, ready to be picked up and used.

—M.H.E.

Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation in Neuropsychiatry

edited by Mark S. George, M.D., and Robert H. Belmaker, M.D. American Psychiatric Press, Washington, D.C., 2000, 298 pages, \$44.00.

For centuries, scientists have dreamed of being able to stimulate the brain noninvasively in an awake, alert individual and simultaneously observe changes in behavior. Here, the authors detail how transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS) has advanced very close to that goal and in some limited circumstances has even achieved it. TMS involves the rapid application of very high magnetic fields and is different from the work involving constant exposure to low-field magnets that is so popular at the moment. This book comprehensively reviews TMS, covering its history, physics, safety, and recent research and clinical work.

The editors have done an outstanding job of assembling a distinguished group of experts in this exciting field, retaining a balanced presentation with relatively few weak points. Overall, the content is clear, with numerous examples and explanations that increase clinical relevance. Many of the chapters have 15 or fewer pages, yet still contain the essence of the material. Longer chapters are subdivided by pertinent headings to facilitate reading. Summary and conclusion paragraphs assist the reader in reviewing the chapters, and tables and figures occur throughout the text for quick reference.

Although for the purpose of this review I have focused on general themes rather than specifics, this book is worth reading for its good summaries of specific research data. It contains a reasonable balance of the contributors' own work and reviews of the literature. Some of the authors do better than others at organizing and presenting the studies in their areas (as with any multiauthored text), but *Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation in Neuropsychiatry* is well written and unusually coherent. The target audience is anyone interested in how the brain works: clinical researchers of brain function, neuroscientists, neurologists, general psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers.

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