

and Law in a 2003 *BMJ* paper. The information for the public on cardiovascular disease and medicines is well written, although it would have to be for a well-informed person with a reasonably high level of education. The background to the development of the polypill, and the reactions—both positive and negative—to the original paper was very interesting, and the arguments for and against the concept were well put. Most pertinent points were covered. The book was not referenced per se, but there were references to many studies that were summarised in an appendix, plus a bibliography.

As with most medical stories, evidence moves on or there may be debate about a particular statement or study outcome.

Without references to each statement, such as “unit-of-use sachets have been proven to hugely increase adherence”, there is a small level of frustration at times. The book also focuses on the polypill concept as was originally intended—as a primary prevention strategy for all men over 55 years old. This possibly detracts from what is likely to be the eventual use of the polypill by many—in secondary prevention or those at high cardiovascular risk (e.g. greater than 15% over five years, according to New Zealand guidelines).

This is a small and easily read book. With a polypill getting closer to routine use, it is worth a read by health practitioners, and then perhaps having a copy

or two available for people who may be candidates for the polypill. It is unlikely to convert many health practitioners who oppose the polypill, but may generate more informed debate.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Linda Bryant is on the steering group of the IMPACT Study—a study investigating the polypill for people with ischaemic heart disease or at high cardiovascular risk

Primary Care Mental Health

Edited by Gask L, Lester H, Kendrick T, Peveler R

Reviewed by **Fiona Moir** MBChB, MRCP; Senior Lecturer, University of Auckland

This book is aimed at primary care practitioners and managers, especially those with a clinical role. It provides practical advice on all aspects of mental health, by summarising the latest evidence and demonstrating how to apply it in a day-to-day context. It also contains ideas about ways to educate the primary health care team, and addresses relevant issues such as the primary-secondary interface and mental health promotion. Throughout, it maintains a holistic focus and is inclusive of a service-user perspective.

The book is divided into four sections: “Overarching Themes and Concepts”, “Clinical Issues”, “Policy and Practice” and “Reflective Practice”. This review focuses mainly on the content in “Clinical Issues”. Throughout the text, there are

numerous short summaries and lists of practical points. As well as the more traditional chapter headings of “Depression”, “Suicide” and “Substance Misuse”, others include: “Medically Unexplained Symptoms”, “Physical Health of People With Mental Illness”, and “Sexual Problems”. It is clear that the book’s editors and authors are familiar with the common presentations, dilemmas and roles that occur in primary care, and have structured the content accordingly. How refreshing.

In particular, I was pleased to see the inclusion of an excellent chapter on “Anxiety” with clear information about assessment and management, given the current lack of New Zealand guidelines. Over 40 authors contributed to the book and this chapter was co-authored by Auckland Professor, Bruce Arroll along with Tony

Kendrick, one of the book’s editors. It includes a summary of how to diagnose and treat specific anxiety disorders, as well as highlighting presentations that are commonly unrecognised in primary care.

There were many things I liked about this book, one of them being that it is written for all primary care practitioners, not just those with a medical qualification, thus reflecting the multidisciplinary nature of primary mental health care, and emphasising the importance of up-skilling the whole team. It is packed with coherent practical advice, drawing on guidelines and protocols and presenting them in a useful fashion. For instance an established Eating Disorder protocol is ‘simplified and amended’ into succinct management points. The authors are also not afraid to voice an opinion about what

needs to be done in the best interest of the patient. In the chapter “Emergencies in Primary Care”, the importance of managing the transition from secondary to primary care is stressed, and the responsibility for this is firmly placed in the primary practitioner’s court.

There were only a couple of small points where I found fault. For instance, should “Personality Disorder” be listed as an “Acute Mental Health Primary Care Emergency”, and why were more “Communication Skills” not included? Also readers in search of a one-stop-shop for clinical advice could be disappointed, as specifics such as drug dosage and optimum length of treatment were beyond

the scope of this book. Although the book has a strong UK flavour, most of the content is pertinent and applicable to a New Zealand context.

This book is written for those of us who do not want to wade through pages of theory, evidence and waffle to find clinical information (“OK all very interesting but how can I actually help this patient?”) If you do like reading about ‘the bigger picture’, those sections are included, but I suspect that the “Clinical Issues” chapters will be the real draw-card to most practitioners. Here the evidence is summarised with a consistent primary care focus, in easy-to-find tables with practical points about assessment and management.

Buy one as a reference for your practice, and make sure your colleagues don’t take it home (the policy and conceptual parts are actually very interesting and readable too). Although we are accustomed to e-learning, there is still a place for an excellent reference book, and for primary care mental health, I think this is it. Very nice—practical, down-to-earth, well written and, in my view, long overdue.

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The New Health Policy

Robin Gauld

Reviewed by **Associate Professor Jacqueline Cumming** BA, MA, Dip Health Econ, PhD; Director, Health Services Research Centre, School of Government, Victoria University of Wellington

The New Health Policy’ forms part of the excellent ‘State of Health’ series of books published by the Open University Press, focused on contributing to debates on the future of health services, summarising current research and thinking and analysing current and future key policy issues in health.

This book reviews key health policy issues and directions from the mid-1980s on, drawing on experiences particularly in Britain, New Zealand and the United States.

The book begins by setting out the context for recent health policy developments—including demographic changes and population ageing, increasing service demand and limited funding, the need for health systems to improve their performance, the increasing attention

being paid to service quality, and the new diseases and health risks that our populations face. Individual chapters then focus on key policy challenges in health sector funding and organisation; health care quality and safety; health care information and communications technology; governance, professionalism and public participation; public health, health determinants and disease control; and the private sector.

The book does an excellent job of describing the key tensions that arise in contemporary health policy, and discussing how different countries have gone about managing such tensions. The book discusses, in particular, two key philosophical positions underlying health policy—neoliberalism and social democracy—and how each viewpoint is influencing how countries reform their health systems. The book is seen by its

author as a start to a more in-depth discussion on how both of these philosophical positions jointly influence health policy and whether the combination is appropriate. This framework could have been more usefully reflected upon in the individual chapters, and the book could have considered in greater depth how the three countries learn from each other and adapt health policy to suit their individual health system histories and problems.

Students and primary care providers interested in knowing what might be coming next in terms of health policy will find this a highly readable and highly useful resource.

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