

Book reviews

Edited by Allan Beveridge and Femi Oyeboode

**Psychiatric Interviewing and Assessment**

By Rob Poole and Robert Higgs, Cambridge University Press. 2017. £40.49 (pb). 240 pp. ISBN 9781316614037

The first edition of this book has been reviewed previously¹ and many of the same points apply to this second edition². This is a collection of ‘pro tips’ by highly experienced clinicians on a range of topics frequently encountered in clinical practice – not just how to talk to patients and their families but also classifying psychopathology, common conundrums faced by clinicians, how to assess risk and manage relationships with fellow professionals, as well as broader issues such as cultural contexts.

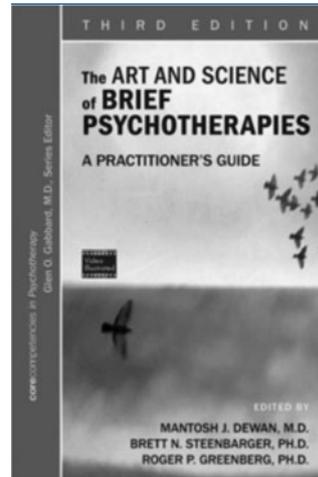
This is not just a book for trainees – who will find its practical, informed ‘how-to’ guides the best way to learn their professional craft – but also for experienced clinicians like myself who will learn better ways to improve their professional practice or other mental health professionals who are expected to perform psychiatric-style assessments, such as seeing patients in emergency departments or after self-harm.

Not everyone will agree with all the contents – the authors share my preference for paper notes but I find that trainees are more enamoured of electronic note systems; in my adult ADHD clinic I find it natural that many patients present with an expectation of treatment – however, I doubt that there are any other such concentrated sources of gold-nugget clinical wisdom that are also critical and informative of limitations of psychiatric practice.

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- 1 Clifford JM. Psychiatric interviewing and assessment (book review). *Br J Psychiatry* 2008; **192**: 75.
- 2 Poole R, Higgs R. *Psychiatric Interviewing and Assessment*. Cambridge University Press, 2017.

**The Art and Science of Brief Psychotherapies: A Practitioner's Guide (3rd edn) (Core Competencies in Psychotherapy)**

Edited by Mantosh J. Dewan, Brett N. Steenbarger & Roger P. Greenberg. American Psychiatric Association Publishing. 2018. £68.50 (pb). 432 pp. ISBN 9781615370795

This book aims to provide a practical guide for clinicians offering brief therapy. Balanced and authoritative chapters by the three editors cover brief therapy in general, including overview topics such as common therapeutic factors, selection of patients for brief therapy, and the therapist's stance in brief work. Alongside this, leading clinicians from various major schools of therapy explain how they conduct their work, with a slant to working in roughly 20 sessions or less. There are web-links to extended video clips to see the therapists in action.

I like the main editors' standpoint; they are open to what different therapeutic approaches have to offer and take a ‘what works for whom’ perspective. Reading the main editors' chapters brought to my mind a scene from the Woody Allen film, *Annie Hall*. Allen's character is waiting in a cinema queue, about to ‘have a stroke’ with rage in connection to the man behind him who is ‘pontificating’ about an arcane academic point. Allen disagrees with the man in the queue and you think the situation will reach impasse until a surreal turn of genius: Allen, with a casualness that betrays his glee, produces the leading academic from the field in question from behind a poster (‘I happen to have the Professor here...’). Playing out a fantasy of wish-fulfilment, the professor calmly pronounces his views as being in line with Allen's and resolves the situation once and for all.

Similarly, I found myself day-dreaming about bringing in Professors Dewan, Steenbarger and Greenberg to coolly and persuasively settle the matter in meetings when us therapists split along the fault-lines and descend into conflict about whose therapy approach is ‘the best’... to the detriment of our patients who we have unwittingly forgotten. These professors would say to us that that some therapies ‘focus more on the present, whereas others focus on the past and present. Some emphasize interactions with the therapist as a primary locus of change efforts; others place greater weight on out-of-session experiences’. Dewan would assert that working out what therapeutic approach (or combinations of approaches) best suits each patient is a better fit with research evidence than ‘unwavering allegiance to single-therapy systems’. And that would settle the matter!

Back to reality... Dewan builds on this inclusive approach by explaining that some patients may benefit from different kinds of therapy at different points in their journey. For me, this reflects the real world, where many patients have undertaken therapies previously and are still seeking something else. Dewan's chapter on combining therapy with medication is also highly recommended: alive to the psychological meaning and impact of medication while providing pragmatic guidance for therapists and prescribers.

In terms of specific chapters, the mentalization chapter by Bateman & Fonagy articulates a subtle argument that has potentially