
O.J. Sahler and John Carr are highly experienced behavioral science professors at the University of Rochester and the University of Washington, respectively. They have designed a textbook that will provide an excellent introduction to the behavioral sciences for medical students and other trainees in the health professions. A portion of the sales proceeds goes for the support of the Association of Behavioral Sciences and Medical Education.

The book is quite broad in its reach, incorporating most topics in the behavioral sciences. In its second edition, it is 86 pages longer than the previous edition. The space is well used for both introducing new topics and expanding previous ones. Brief clinical examples appear throughout the text, and side bars capture the most important information.

Many chapters include useful information that could be directly applied in practice. In 11 pages, the chapter on “Ethical and Legal Issues in Patient Care” succinctly covers the four major ethical principles, as well as advanced directives, informed consent, decision-making capacity, and personal and financial conflicts. The interview questions in the chapter on “Human Sexuality” are more than sufficient to address the psychosocial side of the sexual interview. The chapter on “Changing Risk Behaviors,” written by Richard Botelho, could be used as a manual for his version of motivational interviewing.

Wisely, the editors chose to address cultural issues in two chapters. The first explores culture specifically, distinguishes cultural competency from cultural humility, examines differences in beliefs about disease causation, and reviews patient preferences for a relationship with the provider. The second introduces how cultural factors affect differences in population health.

As for weaknesses, some topics are addressed too briefly, and some subjects could use more explanation. For example, in the chapter on human sexuality, some overly generalized statements are made about women’s sexual responses. At the very least, these statements are incomplete and could be misleading to readers who might be unaware that there may be several possible patterns of sexual response in women. The introductory chapter is somewhat idiosyncratic. It poses an integrated sciences model that one might think is widely accepted, but my quick review of the literature did not reveal significant work using the model. Its advantage is in reducing Engel’s biopsychosocial model to five accessible domains. The text could be greatly improved if those five domains were addressed in the clinical examples that accompany most chapters. As well, two appendices on epidemiology and biostatistics appear added on and do not appear to be connected to student understanding of any of the chapter topics.

This book is competitive with other texts designed for the same purpose. It has a comprehensive and well written US Medical Licensing Examination review section that will enhance the student learning process. This book also has a straightforward layout that will help students quickly identify the main topics addressed in each chapter. Students may find Behavior and Medicine by Wedding and Stuber, which has more illustrations, poetry, and richer clinical examples, to be a more interesting and appealing text.1 Twenty Common Problems in Behavioral Health by DeGruy, Dickinson, and Staton may be more useful for practicing health professionals and residents.2

References


Front page headline: “Painkiller use sparks backlash”1! This newspaper article describes the large increase in five major painkillers sold at retail establishments between 1997 and 2005. It notes the reasons for this increase in narcotics prescriptions, including an aging population with greater need for pain management, unprecedented marketing campaigns by drug companies ($11 billion in 1997 to nearly $30 billion in 2005), and improving patients’ access to pain management on the part of caring physicians. The article also notes the concerns of patients not getting adequate management for their chronic pain problems.