Sexual Dysfunction: The Brain-Body Connection

How many clinicians can say that they include a comprehensive sexual history, including thorough inquiries about sexual dysfunction, in every new patient interview? Edited by Richard Balon, a leading expert in the field of sexual disorders, this volume addresses numerous aspects of sexual dysfunction that are of interest and importance for psychiatric clinicians striving to provide comprehensive patient care within a mind-body framework.

The first chapter provides a solid foundation for exploring sexual dysfunction. Research measures and clinical interviewing techniques are described in detail. Emphasis is placed on understanding both past and present sexual issues, with special attention to medical history, medications/drugs, psychiatric disorders, and relationship issues. The distinction between “dysfunction” and “difficulties” (the latter not associated with pathophysiology or psychopathology) is particularly helpful. A brief section about laboratory tests rounds out the evaluative process, and the division of tests into “recommended” and “optional” is useful.

Following chapters address a myriad of topics that may be seen in medical and psychiatric practices. The chapter on erectile dysfunction (ED) defines the problem, reminds clinicians that ED can signal medical and psychiatric disorders, addresses communication barriers, and lists modifiable risk factors, including obesity, cigarette smoking, illicit drug use, and alcohol use. Laboratory guidelines, information about physical examinations (which may be more useful for general practitioners or urologists than for psychiatric clinicians), and treatment options are also reviewed. The chapter on premature ejaculation (PE) includes pertinent background and diagnostic criteria. Four subtypes of PE are proposed (lifelong, acquired, natural variable, and premature) and specific treatment options are discussed. Additionally, clinicians can use this book as a meaningful reference for sexual dysfunction evaluation strategies and research studies. In using this book to inform and guide practice, practitioners hopefully will feel more prepared to thoroughly inquire about sexual dysfunction, to select appropriate medications based on past and present sexual history, and to remain cognizant of the complex interplay of medical-psychiatric issues as they relate to sexual dysfunction.

Jeanne M. Lackamp, MD
Jeanne.Lackamp@uhhospitals.org

Author affiliations: Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine, Cleveland, Ohio. Potential conflicts of interest: None reported.

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