

**Depression: Key Diseases Series**

edited by James L. Levenson, M.D. *American College of Physicians, New York, N.Y., 2000, 352 pages, \$40.00 (paper).*

*Depression* offers an excellent discussion of every aspect of the disorder, most importantly its management in everyday practice. The book can be divided into 4 sections: epidemiology and diagnosis, treatment, special circumstances, and practice guidelines. Each chapter incorporates case studies to emphasize pertinent clinical teaching points and culminates with recommendations and key points that provide a useful educational summary for review. Clinical vignettes in the last chapter challenge the reader's knowledge of the illustrated principles. As editor, James Levenson has provided a book that is very readable for primary care physicians and is designed to develop a more thorough and systematic approach to the diagnosis and treatment of depression.

The first 3 chapters effectively stress the importance of depression in every medical practice and its impact on the health care system. The practical guidelines and recommendations assist primary care physicians with the somewhat complex problem of diagnosis. Levenson recommends a concise 2-question screening for all patients that should not add significant time to a visit but may yield great benefit to patients.

The next 4 chapters discuss the management of depression in all aspects, including when to refer patients to a psychiatrist, and offer insight into the use of all treatment modalities in practice. The psychopharmacology section is clearly written without any particular biases. Appropriate treatment is urged for our patients with depression. However, because of new pharmaceutical developments, not all of the information is up-to-date and accurate. The author of the psychotherapy chapter explains the different modalities available but states that therapy must be individualized. A detailed approach to referral makes helpful suggestions for discussing this topic with patients to improve their satisfaction and understanding.

The chapters on special populations are enlightening. Valuable guidance is given regarding the unique problems of the elderly, women, children, and the terminally ill groups frequently encountered in most primary care practices. The chapter on women, the most common population to seek medical assistance, thoroughly describes the types of depression that can occur throughout the different stages of life.

The last chapters discuss practice guidelines and drug interactions. The practice guidelines have several benefits, including enhancement of the quality of care and physician confidence in the utilization of an evidence-based approach to treatment. The guidelines are limited by the exclusion of newer developments in the treatment of depression and the acknowledgment that not all patients are included. Figure 12.1 details the treatment of depression and illustrates how to apply the guidelines in everyday practice. Pharmacotherapy can be complex in some patients, and the author uses several cases to stress the importance of managing drug therapy and recognizing potentially harmful interactions.

Finally, the clinical vignettes offer an enjoyable finale. The cases are realistic and thought provoking. The comments from the experts are practical and followed by conclusions that clearly illustrate the day-to-day application of the principles discussed to the management of patients who are suffering from depression.

In summary, *Depression* is a thorough and clinically valuable resource for all primary care physicians. The recommendations and key points provide succinct teaching pearls that can be readily applied to clinical practice. I highly recommend this book for anyone in medical practice, and especially those in primary care. Its value in medical education is its emphasis on the adequate care of depression. *Depression* would be a useful addition to anyone's medical library.

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