Biopsychosocial Medicine: An Integrated Approach to Understanding Illness.

As co-organizer and chair of a 2-day conference by Novartis and One Health in 2002, White edits an account of the proceedings, giving an appreciation of what the biomedical and biopsychosocial (BPS) models have accomplished. This also highlights how much further the latter model needs to go before providing answers to the big questions of occupational and public health. This book will be interesting to those new to the BPS model, with some surprises for those believing they are already familiar with it. The book’s slenderness (242 pages) is misleading, and belies the depth and breadth of the 12 talks given, with edited transcripts of the discussions following each one. The discussions between the participants are as interesting as the talks, and it is enjoyable to witness the proponents of bold theories being tested by their peers.

The calibre of the speakers is undoubtedly high, with Drossman, Marmot, Wessely, Steptoe, Waddell and Davey Smith among others doing what they do best—elegantly presenting compelling evidence to support their cases, while causing a little bit of mischief too. This mercurial style is pleasurable—with speakers deliberately changing between praising the BPS model in one scenario, then decrying it in the next. Readers will question their own understanding of the BPS model; such self-reflection from academic texts is rare but delightful when it happens.

This is a collection of proposals concerning post-modern theories of ill-health, supported by good evidence, and the reader who wishes to know more about the strengths and weaknesses of the BPS explanation of complex health relationships will find this book truly enjoyable and enlightening. Wessely’s foreword uses the local geography around Denmark Hill, with the Maudsley Hospital and the Institute of Psychiatry situated across the road from King’s College Hospital, as a good metaphor concerning the opposition of the soma from the psyche. He almost completes it without a dig at the Chronic Fatigue fraternity—succumbing in the end: quite cheeky for someone who has his feet on both sides of the street! Physicians with a keenness for epidemiology, sociology or psychology will treasure this collection.

**Rating**

☆☆☆☆☆ (Buy, read and keep)

Craig Jackson