Psychiatry. A Very Short Introduction

Given the relative frequency of mental health issues that present to the jobbing occupational health professional, it is useful to have an understanding of the language of psychiatry and the therapeutic modalities available. Not only will this allow a more informed understanding of how to support individuals but it will also lead to a more enlightened and fruitful dialogue with colleagues in general practice and psychiatry to whom we may be referring or requesting reports.

An awful lot of information is packed into this short and very readable text written by the professor of Social Psychiatry at Oxford University who has also acted as the psychiatric advisor to the UK Parliamentary committee scrutinizing the UK Mental Health Bill.

This book sets out to explain what psychiatry is, and what it is not and then goes on to cover a broad range of topics, from the main illnesses and their identification, to the history of their treatment and the future of the discipline.

The major mental illnesses are identified and defined and reasoning given as to why they are no longer considered just variations of 'normality'. There is some historical perspective with the charting of the rise and demise of the asylum leading into developments surrounding ‘Care in the Community’. A chapter devoted to the flourishing of psychoanalysis and its later transformation into more accessible psychotherapies is particularly interesting given the current evidence-based focus on the merits of accessing these treatments for a wide spectrum of mental ill health.

The historical background, while interesting is, admittedly not of much educational value in the occupational setting but could be easily skipped over. I felt it did break the book up, making it more readable and less like an educational text. The absolute bonus of this book is its compact and neat size which means it can be tucked away in a jacket pocket and dipped into in an idle moment!

If you are looking to refine or extend your understanding of the seemingly dark arts of psychiatry, then I can recommend this to you.

Rating (overall verdict)

★★★★ (Buy, read and keep)

David Haldane