Medically Unexplained Symptoms, Somatisation and Bodily Distress: Developing Better Clinical Services

This book is written by international contributors and edited by professors of psychological and psychosomatic medicine. The book’s target readers are psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, GPs and public health policy advisors.

They explain that medically unexplained symptoms are common, disabling and expensive. Some of the examples given of such illnesses are headaches, chest and limb pains, abdominal symptoms, irritable bowel syndrome, fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome and they note that in a patient these often coexist.

The book explains that at present, these conditions are inadequately treated and are often managed by multiple referrals and investigations concentrating on each symptom or illness in isolation. They propose a re-evaluation of the terminology, training of professionals and clinical management with a change of classification to an umbrella term of Bodily Distress.

Each chapter tackles an aspect of the management of these conditions and is written by a selection of different contributors. The book includes chapters on identification, epidemiology, evidence-based treatments, barriers to improving treatment and organization of care with comparisons between countries. The chapters are all excellently supported by evidence-based guidelines and references and this book is a comprehensive discussion regarding these common and often contentious conditions.

Overall, this book is an important and interesting read for GPs who manage these common physical symptoms on a daily basis and for public health policy advisors. For occupational health physicians, some of the chapters are less relevant such as managing symptoms in children and developing policy but this book is still extremely thought provoking when considering sickness absence advice and ill health retirement opinions.

It is relatively expensive and I would suggest reading this book by borrowing it or by purchasing it for a reference or training library.