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BOOK REVIEWS

The Sexual Health of Men. Laura Serrant-Green, John McLuskey (eds). Oxford, UK: Radcliffe Publishing Ltd, 2008. ISBN-13: 978-1-84-619034-6. Price: £24.95. Pages: 146 (paperback)

The book sets out to give an overview of the position of men's sexual health in policy decisions, some of the historical reasons for this and opinions about sociological aspects of health-seeking behaviour by men. The editors state that the book is aimed at health and social care professionals, but its main themes seem to be aimed at policymakers and commissioners, rather than those in the field. It is a multi-author book, edited by two highly academic RGNs, and has a large number of references.

After the first introductory chapter comes one entitled 'Recasting masculinity: mapping out challenges and opportunities for public health'. The authors say this is "a crucial review of perspectives on the nature of masculinity. Written in a clear and accessible style...". However, this is a turgid account of their literature search (not limited to sexual health) and I disagreed with some of their conclusions. For example, they conclude that men delay seeking help for anorexia because they identify this condition as a female illness. But it is part of the illness itself that sufferers (male or female) deny that anything is wrong. In one part, I think they contradict themselves – but the convoluted prose is such that I cannot be sure!

The following chapter, written by the editors, covers much of the same ground, but is at least readable. Common physical conditions are given a superficial overview in the next chapter. Psychosexual complaints are dealt with adequately, but the information is standard BASRT and can be found in many other books. The chapter on men's sexual behaviour is limited to a narrow focus on attitudes to condom use!

Contributors also discuss sexual behaviour and sexual health promotion for black and minority ethnic (BME) men. Some examples of pilot schemes for involving BME men in their

sexual health care are given. It is disappointing that the information has not been brought up to date; one alludes to initial data from 2005, and another to events that would take place in the future in 2006. The final chapter on providing sexual health services for men is also dated, with no references after 2005, and no innovative proposals.

It is disappointing that there seemed little original thinking. This is a not useful book for clinical health professionals, whether nurses or "medics" (as the latter are referred to in the introduction) and it is a pity that the title does not reflect the content.

Reviewed by **Gill Wakley**, MD, FFSRH
Advisory Editor, *Journal of Family Planning and Reproductive Health Care*

Sexual Dysfunction: The Brain–Body Connection (Advances in Psychosomatic Medicine). Richard Balon (ed.). Basel, Switzerland: Karger, 2008. ISBN-13: 978-3-80-558357-2. Pages: 174. Price: SFr\$39.00 (hardback)

It would be fair to say that the brain–body connection is an important one in any illness or dysfunction, but even more so in sexual dysfunction because normal sexual function seems to be so important in a person's perception of their general well-being. This volume attempts to integrate all the different aspects of physical or mental illness and sexual dysfunction and is definitely a book to have on the shelf for all practising sex therapists. Other clinicians who would find it a useful reference book are general practitioners, trainees in sexual and reproductive health, nurses in general practice as well as specialities like urology, gynaecology, family planning and psychiatry. Although the book is quite academic in the layout and presentation of the chapters, each author has made a particular effort to make the information very readable and understandable. Clinicians who have some prior

experience or understanding of sexual dysfunctions or difficulties presenting in a clinical context will find it most useful.

There are chapters dealing with research methodology and diagnosis, erectile dysfunction, premature ejaculation (which I found most interesting and most likely to change my practice), impact of physical illness (which is very concise, well-written and informative considering the breadth of subject matter), impact of mental illness, psychotropics and sexual dysfunction, drugs of abuse (of great significance where illicit drug use is a contributor to sexual dysfunction or where it prevents successful rehabilitation) and the use of imaging in sexual dysfunction.

The book delivers what it sets out to achieve, namely give a definitive review of new developments in sexual dysfunction with a focus on the brain–body connection. The frustration is the lack of consistency in the approach used by different authors to address their individual topics. Thus, there are chapters where the evidence relating to the dysfunction is systematically explored and elucidated but others where a more narrative approach cannot capture the depth of a proper systematic and analytic one. In particular, the chapter on erectile dysfunction disappoints in lacking critical appraisal of current evidence or traditional techniques, and the Cochrane Review on this topic only gets a passing mention. I would have also preferred the chapter on imaging to have given more guidance to clinicians on using imaging better to inform management of different dysfunctions. Overall, I am grateful to have been able to review the book, as by doing so I have learnt a tremendous amount in a short time.

Reviewed by **Neelima Deshpande**, MRCOG, Dip PST
Staff Grade Doctor in Family Planning and Psychosexual Therapist, Heart of Birmingham Teaching Primary Care Trust (HoBTPCT), Birmingham, UK