

BOOK REVIEW

THE COMPLETE PSYCHIATRIST

Editors: Dinesh Bhugra, Stuart Bell, Alistair Burns and Oliver Howes. Published in 2010 by The Royal College of Psychiatrists, 373 pages. ISBN 978-1-904671-90-9. ASEAN Journal of Psychiatry, Vol.12(2), July – Dec 2011: XX XX

What makes a “complete psychiatrist”? As an early career psychiatrist who is still learning the ropes of the profession, I found the title of this book, ‘The Complete Psychiatrist’, very appealing. Psychiatrists of today are not only expected to be competent clinicians but also skillful managers, leaders, researchers and savvy public figures. So, did this book, presented as “*an essential guide to the complex world of psychiatric practice, aimed at psychiatrists at all levels, ... covering key areas including leadership, management and personal skills, context of the psychiatrist within healthcare systems and career development,*” live up to my expectations? Here are some positive highlights of this book:

1. Highly readable.

The contents are clearly divided into 4 main parts: general considerations about healthcare systems, leadership and management skills, essential personal skills and careers in psychiatry. The authors wrote succinctly in simple English, which enabled me to digest 3 chapters within 3 hours aboard a budget airplane directly after the above-mentioned workshop.

2. Practical approach.

The authors wrote from their numerous experiences in their areas of expertise and offered useful strategies on handling real-life situations and how to avoid common pitfalls. The overall tone of the book was down to earth and candid. Personally, I found the chapter on ‘Academic Careers’ written by a

female academician very enlightening, especially the postscript on tips on how to maintain a healthy work-life balance.

In terms of perspective, the chapters on ‘Higher Degrees’ and ‘How to work with the media – and survive’ had a hint of cynicism in them. The author of ‘Higher Degrees’ seemed to have had adopted a ‘been there, done that, so has it all been worth the effort?’ outlook with regards to pursuing higher academic degrees. For those who might be contemplating the prospect of pursuing a PhD, such a viewpoint may offer a heavy dose of realism in helping to weigh the costs of such an endeavor. The chapter on the media gave me the impression of a soldier who became weary after having to constantly battle with hostile foes in the media. Nevertheless, both these chapters ended on a hopeful note in true psychiatrist fashion. In view of this book being written by psychiatrists in the United Kingdom, due consideration need to be given to our local socio-cultural context in terms of applying the relevant principles in our day-to-day practice.

I would recommend this book to my fellow colleagues; both senior psychiatrists who can further enhance their leadership and management skills, as well as junior psychiatrists, including trainees who are preparing for their Postgraduate Psychiatry Consultation Viva exams. In a nutshell, ‘The Complete Psychiatrist’ offers an opportunity to learn from the wisdom of fellow psychiatrists that have tread many challenging paths, bearing in mind that each individual reader would be led by their own personal convictions and priorities in life.

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