

Expert guide to asthma

Understanding asthma. A management companion. Ronald S Walls, Christine R Jenkins (editors). Sydney: MacLennan and Petty, 2000 (334 pp, \$77). ISBN 0 86433 142 8.

THE PREVALENCE OF ASTHMA in Australia is among the highest in the world and Australians have developed considerable expertise in most disciplines relevant to this condition. The range of authors contributing to this text reflects that knowledge base. It is aimed at non-specialist health professionals with a particular interest in asthma and is a companion to material such as the *Asthma management handbook*.

The book is concise, practical and easy to read, and provides an excellent, authoritative overview of all aspects of asthma and its management. It covers important and often neglected issues such as adherence, alternative therapy, scuba diving, vocal cord dysfunction, food reactions and steroid resistance. The text generally avoids confusion between sensitisers of asthma and triggers of symptoms, often not true of other works in this area. It also places procedures such as bronchial provocation in context.

Individually there are many good chapters, but some inconsistencies exist. An example of this is the comments on

the role of measuring and avoiding aeroallergens and the recognition of cough-variant asthma as an entity. These different comments should be cross-referenced to provide an editorial opinion. Some recommendations, such as allergen avoidance as primary prevention, are put without an adequate evidence base. This could have been balanced with current concepts on immunological maturation and the role of infections and allergens in asthma and atopy. There are some areas that could have been covered in greater depth, such as the debate on early anti-inflammatory treatment, especially in children, and the use of procedures such as induced sputum.

The first chapter was written by the late Ann Woolcock and is a fitting tribute to her major contribution to the understanding and management of asthma worldwide. There are a few minor errors and it is a pity that the Asthma Foundation of Western Australia was omitted from the list of resources. The information provided, from basic concepts to management principles, by such an extensive range of internationally recognised experts is good value at \$77.

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Joyride: a "must-read"

Life on a roller-coaster. Living well with depression and manic depression. Madeleine Kelly. Sydney: Simon & Schuster, 2000 (\$24.95, xiv + 242pp). ISBN 0 7318 0948 3.

THE "ROLLER-COASTER" of Kelly's superb book is bipolar disorder, although it is clear that she has disdain for the modern terminology, preferring the more descriptive rubric "manic depression". Kelly's book is timely. Far from being an uncommon disorder, as taught in my undergraduate days, it is now known that bipolar disorder affects 1% to 2% of the community. Furthermore, it was found to be the sixth most disabling medical condition in the recent WHO and World Bank Global Burden of Disease report.¹

Life on a roller-coaster has immediately gone into my "must-read" trilogy for patients/consumers with this illness (and their families and friends). The other two are Kay Jamison's *An unquiet mind* (Knopf, 1995) and Margo Orum's *Fairytales in reality* (Pan Macmillan, 1996). While Jamison's and Orum's books are autobiographical, Kelly's book is a thoughtful and practical survival guide to the condition, or, in her own terms, "living well" with it. She brings an intriguing life experience to this book. Qualified as a medical practitioner, Kelly has experienced the "roller-coaster" first hand for many years, and has since worked as a secretary and writer.

The book provides an accessible and articulate smorgasbord of information on bipolar disorder, but, more evocatively, guidance on how to live with it. It is an easy read, but

could also be delved into piecemeal as a resource on diverse topics such as treatments (drug and non-drug); study and work; managing money; relationships; spirituality and mania; and bringing up children as a parent with bipolar disorder.

Kelly is at her most incisive and dryly humorous when talking about surviving the medical system. She gives delicious guidelines on how to choose a psychiatrist, and the differences between public and private institutions. For example: "Activities available in public psychiatric hospitals are typically limited to smoking and watching television. If you can concentrate, bring a book or learn to like daytime television!"

Her over-riding message, though, is upbeat and positive but well grounded in reality: "This is the roller-coaster ride. Welcome aboard!"

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1. Details of this report can be found at the following website: <http://www.who.int/msa/mnh/ems/dalys/intro.htm> □

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