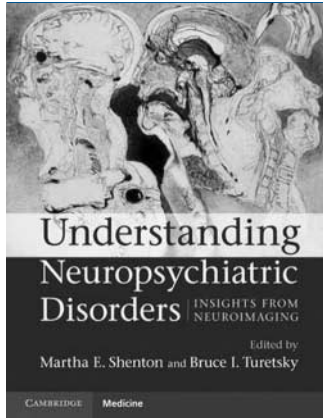


Book reviews

Edited by Allan Beveridge, Femi Oyeboode
and Rosalind Ramsay



**Understanding
Neuropsychiatric
Disorders: Insights from
Neuroimaging**

Edited by Martha E. Shenton
& Bruce I. Turetsky.
Cambridge University Press. 2011.
£125.00 (hb). 592pp.
ISBN: 9780521899420

Psychiatrists have had access to X-rays and EEGs to examine patients' heads for about 100 years, and it is about 40 years since the advent of modern brain imaging techniques like SPECT, PET, CT and MRI. They provide the most practically obtained window on the brain, the organ of interest in psychiatry. So how come we are not better versed in these procedures, do not use them routinely in clinical practice, and our knowledge of the major 'neuropsychiatric' disorders has not advanced more quickly?

The answers to these linked questions are themselves inter-related. Psychiatrists took themselves off from neurology around the turn of the past century, and continue to place greater emphasis on training in psychotherapy than in pharmacology and neuroscience. In all but old age psychiatry, we are out of the habit of ordering investigations. Certainly, there is little or no rationale for greater use of routine brain imaging in initial presentations of dementia than in first-episode psychosis, or, for that matter, in headache rather than depression, as the diagnostic yield is not any different. Partly, of course, it is in the nature of our subject – the complex disorders we attempt to manage defined as they are by the absence of gross brain pathology. And, as we are reminded in this book, it is easy to forget that the first reliable demonstrations of enlarged ventricles and reduced cerebral substance in dementia, schizophrenia and alcoholism were comparatively recent and that it is only in the past two decades that we have been able to examine compartments of the brain.

This well-produced, highly organised and informative volume represents part of the prescription required to remedialise psychiatry. Each of the major disorders receives chapters on structural, functional and chemical imaging where there are enough data to justify that. I particularly liked the regularly interspersed, wise commentaries by senior researchers who have been trailblazers in their fields, especially those by Mony de Leon and colleagues on dementia and by Scott Rauch on anxiety. Another welcome and unusual feature are the detailed tables comprehensively summarising the key findings of the studies that make up the literature in several fields. These, the text and of course some stunning illustrations make it clear that substantial progress has been and will continue to be made.

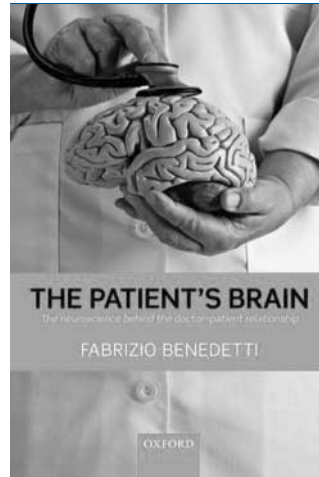
Being critical of the book for a moment, there is a sizeable gap as regards electrophysiology, although some would dispute whether that is brain imaging. The evidence for imaging abnormalities in those at high risk of schizophrenia is also

neglected, but the chapter on schizophrenia is particularly strong on the possible pathology being imaged. There is also very little on the use of machine learning to classify patient groups or on indices of clinical significance anywhere in the book, but those fields are still far from ripe. There is nothing much on developmental disorders other than autism and Williams syndrome. Most of the authors are American, but that is where most of the research was and is done. Overall, the book is excellent – without doubt the best available single resource about neuroimaging of psychiatric disorders. Although I fear my copy may end up in the hands and offices of curious colleagues, budding researchers should take note that they will need more technical detail than is available within this tome.

As image resolution inevitably improves, and innovative software analysis tools steadily accrue, we shall probably see larger and more quantitative studies that deal with comorbidity and possess the statistical sophistication to allow the '1 v. N' studies required for brain imaging to attain true clinical significance. If we psychiatrists are to retain our medical credentials, we need to improve our skills in brain imaging as in the rest of clinically relevant neuroscience. We may eventually discover blood tests for psychiatric disorders, as looks increasingly likely in dementia, or we may end up using brain imaging techniques that we cannot currently envisage, but we need to be prepared for the decent possibility that we could use novel applications of existing techniques to enable us to objectify diagnosis and treatment decisions as in the rest of medicine.

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**The Patient's Brain:
The Neuroscience Behind
the Doctor-Patient
Relationship**

By Fabrizio Benedetti.
Oxford University Press. 2010.
£34.95 (pb). 304pp.
ISBN: 9780199579518

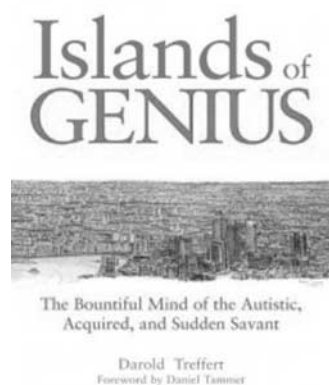
Following on from his highly acclaimed book *Placebo Effects*, Benedetti has taken his understanding of the neuroscience underpinning the therapeutic response to turn the microscope on the doctor–patient relationship. I was doubtful when reading the publisher's critique of how access and appreciation of this knowledge would benefit physicians and psychotherapists. At first glance the book is filled with scary pictures of scans and experimental design, yet I found myself developing a huge respect for the author's vast knowledge, which he shares with the reader in a very accessible fashion. A limited grasp of neuroanatomy is required to understand the significance of the work.

Benedetti breaks down the underpinning conceptualisation of the doctor–patient interaction to four stages: feeling sick, seeking relief, meeting the therapist and receiving therapy. He then takes time to consider how these stages can be affected by various factors, from the nature of engagement with the therapist to alterations in the capacity of people with various illnesses to access this benefit.

The psychosocial context of clinical contact, with the instillation of hope, trust and the expectation of a positive outcome, is shown to be a powerful mediator of the placebo effect. Benedetti extrapolates this to the importance of practical aspects of clear communication regarding interventions and an explanation of the procedure by the clinician. The General Medical Council is rightly concerned that medical students are to be taught the psychosocial skills necessary for an effective clinician. It would be useful for medical students to understand that there is a strong scientific evidence base to the importance of this endeavour. Equally so, doctors who are observed not to take the therapeutic relationship seriously might have to address this in the same way as any other deficit of practice would have to be tackled – with retraining and assessment.

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**Islands of Genius:
The Bountiful Mind
of the Autistic, Acquired,
and Sudden Savant**

By Darold A. Treffert.
Jessica Kingsley Publishers. 2010.
£19.99 (hb). 328pp.
ISBN: 9781849058100

Savant syndrome, a paradox of both mental deficiency and superiority, has been a consuming interest of American psychiatrist Darold Treffert for 47 years. A book by such an authority should be welcomed but unfortunately, despite its authorship, *Islands of Genius* is disappointing.

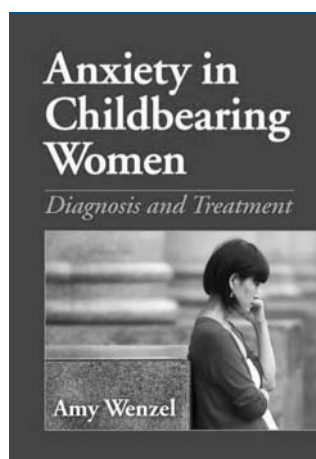
It is not that the subject is dull. Any comprehensive theory of human brain function will need to take into account the existence of savants and the talents of prodigious savants are extraordinary. Kim Peek, who partly inspired Dustin Hoffman's character in the film *Rain Man*, memorised 12 000 books during his lifetime. A century earlier the celebrated musician Thomas Bethune had a repertoire of 7000 pieces despite a vocabulary of only 100 words. The book is rich in detail and thorough enough to satisfy all but the most curious. It is also not afraid to explore the subject's boundaries although, where evidence is lacking, Treffert has a tendency to concentrate on his pet theories rather than adopting a more balanced approach. He never writes of savants as simply

curiosities and the tenderness with which he relates their stories and those of their carers could serve as an example to us all. In part, this book is a championing of their cause: Treffert is critical of IQ scores, for example, which he considers do a disservice to savants and he is at pains to point out that savants can be creative in addition to having extraordinary memory and calculation skills.

Unfortunately, a sentimental streak is often evident in Treffert's writing and this comes close to overwhelming the book's other strengths. This is most marked where savant case histories are presented. These 14 chapters are superlative-laden and their personal-triumphs-against-adversity narratives would be more suited to a glossy magazine. Regrettably, they take up a third of the book. They also sit uncomfortably with earlier chapters about neuroscience, which are predominantly academic in delivery, and later chapters, by guest contributors, which concern the beneficial effects resulting from 'training the talent' of savants. This diversity of styles and subjects leaves one wondering for whom the book is actually intended.

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**Anxiety in Childbearing
Women: Diagnosis
and Treatment**

By Amy Wenzel.
American Psychological
Association. 2010.
US\$69.95 (hb). 275pp.
ISBN: 9781433809002

Amy Wenzel has succeeded in creating a scholarly, immensely readable text, which focuses with great precision on the specific area of perinatal anxiety disorders. This is an area which has often been overshadowed by other psychiatric disorders in the puerperium. Therefore, this book is a welcome addition to the panoply of perinatal psychiatry texts which too frequently pay insufficient regard to this topic.

The text is well structured, with a useful introduction orienting the reader to the subject and the way arguments are to be constructed. This is followed by Part 1, which explores each of the major anxiety disorders sequentially, following a standardised approach. Each chapter looks at the prevalence of the disorder, its effects, potential comorbidity with depression, possible aetiology and a most useful section focusing on practical implications. Each section gives a comprehensive review of the data, explained in easy-to-understand terms. Where limitations in the literature are identified – which is frequent – Wenzel demonstrates a thoughtful application of the evidence obtained in the general population to this specific perinatal population. She eloquently generates hypotheses from the existing evidence base and suggests areas where further research should focus. The chapters are enhanced by robust and comprehensive referencing.