The St Vincent’s Hospital

Handbook of Clinical Psychogeriatrics

Edited by David Burke & Ayse Burke
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The contributors have worked to ensure that all information in this book concerning assessment, diagnosis and management, including prescribing of medication, is accurate and consistent with accepted standards, however the ultimate responsibility for all aspects of patient care rests with the treating clinician. Neither the publishers nor the contributors can be held responsible for errors or for any consequence arising from the use of information contained herein. For detailed prescribing information or instructions on the use of any medications, instruments, products or procedures discussed herein, please refer to the information and/or instructions issued by the manufacturer or producer responsible.

The views and opinions of the individual contributors contained herein do not necessarily represent the views and opinions of the Curran Foundation or of St Vincent’s Hospital, Sydney.
This book is dedicated to the memory of Dr Raymond Seidler, a general practitioner committed to the care of older people and a strong supporter of our service.
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An older person’s mental health is influenced by his or her access to health services, education, employment, housing, social services, and justice, and by freedom from abuse and discrimination. An older person’s mental health is also influenced by the quality of his or her relationships, level of activity, diet, level of family, social, and community engagement, and by the level of cognitive stimulation provided by the environment. Psychogeriatrics is the multidisciplinary speciality that focuses on optimising an older person’s mental health by assessing and managing the complete range of biological, psychological, social, and cultural factors that are responsible for an older person requiring mental health care. Around 6% of older people will suffer from a mood disorder, an anxiety disorder, or a substance use disorder in any one year. Around 2–3% of older people will have a personality disorder. And a further 6% of older people will suffer from dementia, with about 30% of those having psychiatric complications.

One of the aims of the St Vincent’s Hospital Handbook of Clinical Psychogeriatrics is to provide a guide to the assessment and management of the common mental health problems in older people through the integrated, multidisciplinary perspectives of medicine, nursing, psychology, social work, and occupational therapy. Another aim is to provide a guide to the specialised aspects of assessment and management that are specific to psychogeriatrics. And the third aim is to explore some of the population issues that are particular to psychogeriatrics.

The ageing of the world’s population is well documented, and it is estimated that by 2050, the number of people over 65 will have tripled in developed countries and quadrupled in developing countries. There is a widely held assumption that this will place an enormous stress on our health-care systems and an enormous strain on our government finances. This might be true—if nothing else changes in the interim. There is, however, the possibility that efforts to prevent or reduce morbidity in older people, and efforts to deliver health care more efficiently and effectively, might reduce the anticipated burden. In psychogeriatrics, these efforts hinge on the adoption of a positive model of ageing, a focus on education and prevention, and an evidence-based, best-practice model of care that is efficient and effective.

The fourth aim of the St Vincent’s Hospital Handbook of Clinical Psychogeriatrics is to provide a positive perspective on older people’s mental health, to highlight the opportunities for prevention, to describe effective methods for the reduction of mental health problems and mental illness in older people, and to describe a model of care in psychogeriatrics that is high-quality, evidence-based, efficient, and effective.

Psychogeriatrics is a relatively new and evolving speciality in psychiatry, in both developed and less-developed nations. The benchmark service models proposed by lead organisations around the world appear to be quite homogenous, and include inpatient beds, subacute beds, long-term beds, specialist memory disorder clinics, consultation-liaison services, outpatient clinics, and separate community teams for psychogeriatrics and dementia, indexed to the size of the population of older people. It seems that few such comprehensive services exist, even in developed nations.
The fifth aim of the St Vincent’s Hospital Handbook of Clinical Psychogeriatrics is to present a model of service that is less resource intensive than the generally accepted benchmark models, but is still comprehensive and still able to achieve the best possible patient outcomes by collaboratively utilising other available resources.

I would like to acknowledge the people who have contributed significantly to the development of the St Vincent’s Hospital Psychogeriatric Mental Health Service, and to thank them for their work, support, and encouragement, in particular Brian Kelly, Liz Abbott, and Sandy Beveridge, as well as Jonathan Anderson, Nirmalan Anthonypillai, Margaret Bramwell, Brandi Cole, Erin Crumlin, Jennifer Dunn, Mary Foley, Brett Gardiner, Victoria Harrison, Ian Hickie, Raja Kadib, Bernadette Keenan, Lyn Lee, Michelle Mahoney, Peter McGeorge, Helen Miller, Grainne O’Loughlin, the late Ray Seidler, John Snowdon, Kerrie Stubbs, and Kay Wilhelm.

I hope this book inspires and assists you as a health professional to achieve better mental health outcomes for the older people in your care.

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In the tradition of the Sisters of Charity, the St Vincent’s Hospital Psychogeriatric Mental Health Service team strives to provide the highest quality mental health care to older people in need, especially the poor, the homeless, and the disadvantaged.