

patients. The last of the four sections, "Patient care by the primary care worker", looks at psychological and pharmacological treatment options as well as considering broader issues such as family therapy. The book concludes with useful appendices including ICD and DSM-IV classifications and a helpful glossary of terms. The chapter on "Substance Abuse" is 15 pages long. In an attempt to mention as many substances as possible within the given constraints of a small book one and a half pages are devoted to alcohol dependency. This particular chapter also carries a strong emphasis on "challenging patients" who may not realize that they have a problem, rather than giving greater emphasis to motivational counselling and consideration of the psychology of change. Each substance is considered under the headings of "Intoxification", "Withdrawal and Treatment/Detoxification". Given the brevity of each section only the most basic detail is included for each drug.

In summary, the *Handbook of Psychiatry for Primary Care* is typical of the Oxford Handbook series with its hardwearing plastic cover. As is also typical of any "handbook" its content is necessarily brief, but on occasions the amount of space devoted to certain topics is disappointing. There are many good things about this book, but undoubtedly its greatest achievement will be in providing the first book of its kind to South African primary health-care workers for whom the cultural context will make it most applicable.

TONY JONES
The Vine Medical Centre,
Maidstone, Kent, UK

Scientific Unit Conversion, 2nd edn
FRANÇOIS CARDARELLI (English
translation by M.J. SHIELDS)
London, Springer, 1999
488 pp., £24.50, ISBN 1 85233 043 0

Numerical data are useless without units. There have been countless systems of units, some restricted to a particular trade or profession, others to particular countries or regions, often with the same or similar names representing different quantities in different systems. Although

the influence of English-speaking peoples throughout the world made the Imperial system one of the more widely used, the only truly international system is the appropriately named "International System of Units" (Système International d'Unités, SI). This has seven base units, of mass, length, time, temperature, amount of substance, electric current intensity and luminous intensity. In addition there are supplementary units (plane angle and solid angle) and numerous derived units (compounds of the base units). Prefixes, from Y (yotta, 10^{24}) to y (yocto, 10^{-24}) allow all quantities to be expressed concisely.

So far, so good; but there are, of course, numerous other systems of units that remain in common use and others which, although obsolete, may still be encountered in writings published before the SI system was introduced. Hence the need for a book of conversion factors: this book.

Most of us only require to be able to convert milligrams into micromoles, or pints into litres, but this book covers thousands of units. A history of measurement and accounts of numerous currently or formerly widely used systems is followed by a glossary of units giving the symbol, dimensions, conversion factor to the SI equivalent and historical notes. Dipping into the latter, I read that a donkey (an obsolete English unit of power equal to about 1/3 of a horsepower) is precisely equal to 248.5666239 Watts; a blink (English, an anecdotal unit of time, I lie not, corresponding to 10^{-5} days) is precisely equal to 0.86400 seconds; whereas a shake (US) is only 10^{-8} seconds. As a racing man, I was surprised to learn that the furlong (2.01168×10^2) metres is considered obsolete, as is the rod (5.0292 metres), the standard English measurement of the size of an allotment plot, but one can make allowances for Dr Cardarelli's devotion to the SI cause: other systems of units are illegal in France.

This book is a mine of fascinating information. Only crossword puzzlers (setters and solvers), Scrabble players and other wordsmiths will want to own a copy, but it should be in every scientific library.

WILLIAM MARSHALL
Department of Biochemistry,
Kings College Hospital, London, UK