ANXIETY

A Mutidisciplinary Review

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P TYRER

Imperial College School of Medicine at St Mary's,
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Dedicated to the tolerant tribe

Ann, illustrious illustrator

Clare, výborná učitelka

Freya, the human face of public health

Jonathan, man of many powers, and

Suki, organiser of manuscripts

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PREFACE

Anxiety is a conundrum and our ignorance about its origins, generation, significance and purpose is profound. We certainly know much more about its manifestations but without this other information our interpretation of these could be badly flawed. Texts on anxiety often attempt to paper over these cracks and present a comprehensive picture of the subject, and although these are often internally consistent, they inevitably contain a great deal of speculation.

This is a personal account of anxiety in its many forms, encountered mainly in a pathological degree during thirty years of psychiatric practice. As such, it is bound to be idiosyncratic and somewhat deviates significantly from more conventional views, particularly with regard to classification. I have tried to be frank and honest about these differences, explaining the reasons for my concerns, and making it clear where my own views deviate significantly from the majority opinion.

Although there are sometimes specific reasons for these deviations, the fundamental one which crystallises my concern over existing views of anxiety is that the emotion has been excessively compartmentalised and its separate elements are too often studied in isolation. We need to be reminded that anxiety is one of the most prominent features of the psychiatric landscape. It is like an old and well recognised tree, that is visible from all perspectives, and whose roots penetrate deep into other conditions and cannot be considered in isolation. My personal view, and I am prepared to admit it may be a mistaken one, is that our present knowledge is so limited that we should continue to regard anxiety as a diffuse emotion that is rarely seen in pure form and that much of its significance in clinical practice and normal function lies in its interactions

with other emotions and behaviour. The facts of anxiety are relatively straightforward; it is their content that confuses.

Despite these differences of opinion from those of others, the format of this book is a fairly standard one. The book is divided into two main sections, a general one in which the main features of anxiety are described, how it is measured and what physiological changes accompany it, and how it is interpreted in dynamic terms; and a second clinical section which describes the ways in which pathological anxiety is classified, how it is treated, and what are its usual outcomes. In a last chapter, I try to bring together the somewhat disparate elements of the preceding discussion to focus on the main core of pathological anxiety and how it relates to the other elements of the mood. There are many omissions, amongst which the most prominent may be the absence of significant discussion about the neuropharmacology of the subject, which I find bewildering in its speed of development and changes of emphasis, but which I am sure has contributed greatly to our understanding.

I have tried to write in relatively simple language but it is impossible to avoid discussing this subject in any depth without introducing the reader to a host of new words that now surround the subject. I have tried to give an appropriate explanation for each of these but appreciate that I may not be successful in clarifying all of them and apologise in advance; I do not understand them all fully either. Because I have indulged in a personal account I realise that many aspects of the subject may be under-represented and some other may be ignored altogether. What I hope will become apparent is that anxiety is both a healthy emotion and a major concern for a very large number of people and, for the latter, our efforts to reduce the suffering associated with it remain woefully inadequate. The book therefore attempts to illuminate our ignorance rather than offer easy solutions; it is in no way a self-help primer.

I should like to thank Jenny d'Souza, Jackie Reynolds and Sarah Dodd for secretarial help, and my many colleagues for giving me at least partial support for my aberrant views on this subject, among whom Nick Seivewright, Siobhan Murphy, Robert Kendell, Paul Pilkonis, Patricia

Casey, Brian Ferguson and Michael Stone are prominent. They have helped me to find a way of understanding the conundrum which I suspect is like the exhortation of the Irish priest, “the steep and narrow path between right and wrong”, but at least has sustained me on my clinical and research travels.

Peter Tyrer

January, 1998

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