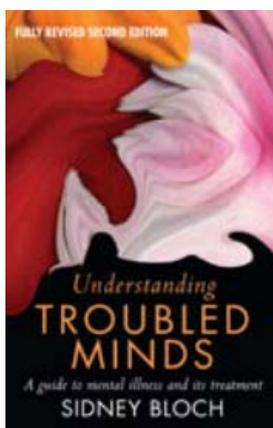


Understanding Troubled Minds: A guide to mental illness and its treatment (2nd edition)

Sidney Bloch. Published by [Melbourne University Press](#) (MUP), June 2011.
ISBN 9780522857542. Contains 371 pages. Price AU\$39.99

The second edition of *Understanding Troubled Minds: A guide to mental illness and its treatment* follows the first edition by psychiatrists Bruce Singh and Sidney Bloch, which was published in 1997. The ambitious aim of providing a “clear, well-informed, objective assessment of the nature of mental illness and its treatment” for the general public is stated in the preface of the 360-page book.



Emeritus Professor Bloch, with decades of experience as a community psychiatrist and editor of the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* between 1991 and 2005 is the sole author, and well placed to tackle the self-imposed challenge of the book.

Set out over 21 chapters *Understanding Troubled Minds* covers a vast range of topics, ranging from the history of psychiatry, to a thorough review of common mental illnesses and their treatment, psychiatric ethics, personality and reactions to modern stress, and topics of special interest including women, children and adolescence, and the elderly.

This is a very readable book with illustrative case reports and quotes from famous personalities emphasising the nature and impact of mental illness.

The tone is authoritative, jargon-free and humanistic, and conveys a sense of optimism and hope for patients and the state of the profession. The introductory chapter on history is particularly helpful as it contextualises the significant recent advances and developments in psychiatry “Astonishingly, more has been achieved in the past 50 years than during the entire 24 centuries since the ancient Greeks inaugurated the systematic study of the disturbed mind”.

Unfortunately the breath of the book comes with sacrifice in the depth of content in relation to some key areas of modern psychiatry. The chapter on drugs and other physical treatments fails to provide a balanced account of the current controversies associated with modern psychopharmacology.

In general the side-effects of medications are under-reported and not sufficiently emphasised, for example the sexual side-effects associated with SSRI antidepressants (such as Prozac) are not mentioned. Metabolic side-effects of antipsychotic medications and their long-term impact are under-emphasised. The recent trends to excessive ‘off-label’ use of psychiatric medications (particularly in the young and elderly), polypharmacy and the at times problematic influence of the pharmaceutical industry in prescribing are left out entirely.

Despite some limitations *Understanding Troubled Minds* is an absorbing, engaging and informative book, which provides a very helpful overview of psychiatry. It is particularly suited to allied health workers, the general public and as a reference source for students.

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