

Reviews

Best of Five MCQs for MRCPsych Paper 3

Lena Palaniyappan & Rajeev Krishnadas
Oxford University Press, 2010, £24.95 pb, 224 pp.
ISBN 9780199553617

How to Pass the MRCPsych CASC

Andrew Iles, Rose Woodall & Flavia Leslie
Oxford University Press, 2010, £24.95 pb, 232 pp.
ISBN 9780199571703

Candidates studying for MRCPsych examinations are on a quest for their Holy Grail revision book. Many invest their faith in one specific tome, hoping its contents hold the secret to a pass mark. The advent of the new style MRCPsych examinations knocked most contenders from their pedestals and rendered many obsolete. As publishers sensed the opportunity, a new generation of MRCPsych books has burst onto the market. The quest is on for the new Holy Grail.

The *Best of Five MCQs for MRCPsych Paper 3* is a real contender. The book starts well, with practical advice on exam preparation and what to expect on the day, including pragmatic exam technique suggestions (if in doubt, tick 'C', apparently). The main focus is an excellent bank of 450 MCQs: clear, varied and logically presented, with 50 questions for each subspecialty. A particular strength is the 'Basic Statistics' section, nicely targeting the required critical appraisal skills. However, the key to useful MCQ revision material is really the answers and here this book excels, providing detailed explanations, each referenced to facilitate further reading. It is a shame the book lacks a final section of mixed subject MCQs to provide more of an exam experience, but this is an efficient, user-friendly, and well-researched addition to the MRCPsych arsenal.

Those who embraced *The Best of 5 MCQs* may gravitate to the publisher's 'sequel', *How to Pass the MRCPsych CASC*, but they could find themselves disappointed. In contrast to the standard CASC revision format, the authors first describe relevant skills and knowledge, and then present ten mock examinations with very general pointers; candidates must refer to the preceding skills sections to piece together model answers. The approach removes the pitfall of biasing general theory to specific scenarios. However, inconveniently, the scenarios do not provide references to relevant pages, leading to much flicking forwards and backwards – an easily avoidable waste of time that reduces the user-friendliness of this book. Furthermore, the layout of the skills section is bizarrely unformatted: it lacks spacing or use of bold type, and consists of excessively concise lists of information in tiny print, rather like reading a copy of a previous candidate's notes. The content is good, but difficult to process. The CASC revision group with whom I trialed this book found that they could not use it effectively to act or assess mock scenarios, the format made the information hard to visualise and memorise, the layout was illogical, and they felt insufficient theoretical information was provided, although they valued the useful phrase suggestions and the introduction describing the practicalities of the examination. *How to Pass the MRCPsych CASC* is a book that may work better for individual study. It assumes a high level of pre-existing knowledge, and candidates may find it most useful

in combination with more detailed revision material. The quest for the Holy Grail continues...

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Long-Term Psychodynamic Psychotherapy: A Basic Text (2nd edn)

Glen Gabbard
American Psychiatric Publishing, 2010, US\$65.00 pb
(incl. DVD), 233 pp.
ISBN 9781585623853

Gabbard addresses the trainee psychotherapist: 'If they have innate talent, most beginning psychotherapists can establish rapport and listen empathically to the patient's story. Then they begin to ask themselves two basic questions: what do I say, and what do I do?' (p. 71). I was gripped. These can sometimes seem like forbidden questions, yet they are often asked in (and outside of) psychotherapy supervision groups.

This text explains the nuts and bolts of what to say and do, as well as the theoretical background, while conveying a flexible approach that does not read like a list of rules. Gabbard adds a neuropsychological perspective to certain parts of the text, which is interesting (particularly in the chapter on dreams) without digressing too much. His approach to psychodynamic psychotherapy is clear and practical, and he is very good at explaining complex concepts. His explanation of projective identification is the clearest I have seen – he uses diagrams to help illustrate the steps involved in this process. He even pokes fun at a common myth in this area, saying that 'projective identification relies on interpersonal pressure or "nudging", rather than a mystical or supernatural exchange of psychic content' (p. 152).

The DVD with clinical vignettes is new to this second edition. The British viewer will easily get over the slight American cultural bias and can find the vignettes an extremely useful resource. The clips are integrated with the text and have accompanying commentary. Gabbard sees patients in various predicaments, including a passive patient who wants the therapist to solve his problems and a woman with borderline personality disorder who explodes at the end of a session but 'forgets' about what happened at the next appointment. I found it extremely useful to see Gabbard working clinically and how he tried to make sense of things with the patient.

I liked how the text crosses over in terms of language and explanation into areas usually associated with other therapies. For example, in discussing the diminution of transference anxieties with time Gabbard uses the model of exposure, explaining that the patient 'habituates to the anxiety with repeated visits to the therapist, who does not react in the way that the patient anticipates [and this helps the patient] differentiate belief from fact' (p. 111).

Unlike some books about therapies, Gabbard does not make psychodynamic psychotherapy seem easy – the vignettes do not always go amazingly well and people drop out of therapy in this book, and this is reassuring. This 'basic' text about psychodynamic psychotherapy is highly readable, yet

not dumbed down. I recommend it to trainees and others working in this area.

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