Contents

Foreword by Marshal Folstein vii
Preface xi
Abbreviations xiii

1 What is the psychiatry of old age and why do we need it? 1
2 Assessing the elderly psychiatric patient 5
3 Differential diagnosis – the 3Ds 23
4 The dementias 31
5 Behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia 49
6 Delirium 57
7 Mood disorders in late life (A – Depression, B – Bipolar disorders and mania) 69
8 Schizophrenia and related disorders in late life 87
9 Neurotic and personality disorders (A – Neurotic disorders, B – Personality disorders) 95
10 Substance abuse and iatrogenesis in late life 113
11 Services for older patients with psychiatric disorders 121
12 The future of the psychiatry of old age 129

Index 137
By the time I launched the first dementia programme at Johns Hopkins in 1979, the psychiatry of old age was well established in the UK. Two small gems from those early days of geriatric psychiatry in the UK – the sections on old age psychiatry in *Clinical Psychiatry* by Mayer-Gross, Slater and Roth and the monograph by Felix Post, *Clinical Psychiatry of Late Life* – influenced my decision to pursue a career in the psychiatry of old age.

This new, brief guide makes geriatric psychiatry accessible to generalists, clinicians not medically trained, and even patients and families. Such efforts are needed in these days of ageing populations and shrinking resources to persuade doctors and the public to reject the prejudice of ageism, and to teach that clinical signs and symptoms of elderly patients are the products of diseases and vulnerabilities, just as they are in younger people, and not the inevitable consequences of ageing which require the discovery of the fountain of youth before the ills of the elderly can be prevented and cured.

In addition to the recognition and explanation of pathological processes causing signs and symptoms, this book promotes the narrative, or meaningful, approach, which illuminates the dignity and right to life of the elderly. The privilege of sharing the stories of almost completed lives is one of the rewards of geriatric practice. In an attempt to demonstrate this to a class of medical students, I interviewed a distinguished 90-year-old American psychiatrist, Mandel Cohen. I expected him to describe the changes he experienced as he grew older. I asked, ‘Doctor, what is it like to be old?’ He replied, ‘I don’t feel old in my mind’, and he wasn’t. Another story that illustrates the dignity of old people and their right to life emerged on an Alzheimer’s disease (AD) unit in a nursing home. The question arose as to the validity of documents signed by family members requesting that patients not be resuscitated. In order to answer this question, I gathered a group of 10 severely impaired residents, none of whom had a Mini-mental State Examination (MMSE) score greater than 10 out of 30, and asked them if they wanted to be resuscitated. When one said, ‘what does “resuscitated” mean’, another member of the group said, ‘you know, brought back to life’. The first person responded ‘well, you have to make allowances for people with memory trouble.’ Seven of 10 said they wanted resuscitation. The ones who didn’t appeared to be depressed. Too often, we fail to honour the dignity of cognitively impaired elderly by asking them if they want to live, and if they don’t want to live by giving them the benefit of an examination to determine if their decision was the product of a pathological process causing dementia or depression.
I would highlight a few aspects of the contemporary assessment, diagnosis and treatment of psychiatric disorders of the elderly surveyed by this book. The first is the importance of using a quantitative cognitive examination for clinical decision-making and for educating patients and families. Although cognitive examinations can be performed by specialists such as neuropsychologists, the treating clinician should examine the patient and be able to explain the results in appropriate terms to the patient and family. The important point here is not which of the several available tests is used, but that clinicians should use some quantitative method suitable for the clinical situation and purpose. Just as medicine was advanced by the introduction of the thermometer, psychiatry has been advanced by the introduction of quantitative methods of assessment. Before the modern thermometer was introduced 150 years ago, physicians felt the skin temperature and judged whether it was too warm. This method was good enough to appreciate the importance of fever, but it was not good enough to measure reliably whether the temperature was rising or falling. Today, it is not enough for the clinician to say that a patient is confused when it is possible to describe quantitatively the severity of the various impairments and to determine by serial measurement whether impairments are improving or worsening.

The second issue I would like to emphasize is the authors’ discussion of that murky diagnostic category, pseudodementia. This term was usually intended to mean that a patient’s cognitive impairment was not due to a neuropathological abnormality, and it implied that all true dementias were irreversible. Pseudodementia was usually applied to elderly persons with depression and cognitive impairment. Follow-up studies indicate that many of the patients so labelled do deteriorate and some have AD. This kind of evidence has been influential in returning the term dementia to its intended usage: deterioration of multiple cognitive functions in clear consciousness, without specifying either aetiology or reversibility. Instead of pseudodementia, designations such as ‘depression with cognitive impairment’ or ‘dementia of depression’ are better descriptors of the condition. This usage also encourages the point of view that depression in the elderly, both in the presence and absence of AD, should be a focus of treatment.

Finally, I would like to draw attention to the authors’ discussion of currently used medications and their side effects. In some circumstances, ‘reverse pharmacology’ – stopping many if not all medications – leads to cognitive improvement. In other circumstances, doctors recommend medications even though treatment options are limited, because there are no curative drugs and the available symptomatic remedies carry substantial risk. In this unhappy situation, the doctors must explain the options to the patient and family and encourage them to collaborate in the decision as to whether the benefits are greater than the risks. This discussion is useful because it offers hope that something can be done or at least that no harm will be done, and it conveys to the patient and family the physicians’ respect for cognitively impaired people, who often perceive that their clinicians do not consider them worthy of their efforts.

This brief guide is a welcome addition to the distinguished publications about geriatric psychiatry from the UK and more recently from many
other countries. In addition to introducing the field to students and generalists, this brief book might even persuade some young student to join the field, just as 40 years ago one small book and a small part of a larger book written by their predecessors steered me into a satisfying career which gave me the opportunity to teach, to learn from, and to collaborate with many elderly patients and their families in order to enable them to choose to live as best they could given their individual circumstances.

Marshal Folstein MD,
Miami Beach, 2009
With rapid ageing of the world population, the psychiatry of old age (POA) has become a crucial discipline, because rates of dementia, delirium and late-life functional psychiatric disorders such as depression are increasing quickly in both the developed and developing world as a consequence of the sustained and unprecedented increase in the number of older people. In many developed countries, the subspecialty of psychiatry of old age (also known as old age psychiatry, psychogeriatrics, geriatric psychiatry and geropsychiatry) is now well established, with over 500 subspecialists in the UK and 200 in Australia. Special training programmes for the discipline have been operating in several countries for some years now, and often completion of these programmes leads to the award of a certificate of competence in the psychiatry of old age. In developing countries, especially those with rising affluence, there is emerging interest in the subspecialty and recognition of the need for service providers to acquire expertise in the area. In addition, most basic training programmes for general psychiatrists now require some exposure to and knowledge of POA, and we hope that this trend will strengthen as old people approach one-quarter of the total population in many places. Despite this need, although there are excellent comprehensive, detailed and expensive texts on POA, there are fewer good, short, inexpensive books on this subject, and those that exist tend to have a national rather than an international focus. For this reason, supported by Cambridge University Press (CUP) and with the endorsement of the International Psychogeriatric Association (IPA), the four of us resolved to write a book on POA that would be short, comprehensive and affordable. In making this decision, we were mindful both of an apparent unmet need and the involvement that all four of us have had with IPA over many years (all of us have been members of IPA’s Board of Directors, EC was IPA secretary and then president, and DA has edited IPA’s peer-reviewed journal *International Psychogeriatrics* since 2003). This, after a prolonged gestation and writing process, is the result. It is aimed at trainee psychiatrists, higher trainees in the psychiatry of old age, geriatricians and trainee geriatricians, general psychiatrists, neurologists, physicians in training, general practitioners, allied health staff, nurses and medical students. We hope that our audience will be international, so the book’s content is not limited solely to the experience of POA in the three countries in which the authors have lived and worked, but is informed by our experience of visiting, teaching and talking to our colleagues in a wide variety of countries around the world. In order to keep the book to a relatively manageable size, the text is not referenced with citations for every statement made, but we hope that
the suggestions for further reading given at the end of each chapter (many of
which are available free of charge to members of IPA) will be found to be up to
date and helpful. We trust that health practitioners around the world will find this
to be a useful book and that in due course a second edition will be needed. To that
end we encourage readers to suggest to us how this edition could be improved
(contact David Ames on dames@unimelb.edu.au). Books like this do not appear
without the help and assistance of a large number of people. We are grateful to
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we have learned most of what little we know about this expanding and intriguing
branch of medicine. David Ames, Edmond Chiu, James Lindesay, Ken Shulman
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Abbreviations

AAMI  age-associated memory impairment
ACE  angiotensin converting enzyme
Ach  acetylcholine
AD  Alzheimer’s disease
ADAS-Cog  Alzheimer's Disease Assessment Scale Cognitive subscale
ADI  Alzheimer's Disease International
ADL  activities of daily living
ApoE  apolipoprotein E
APP  amyloid precursor protein
BPSD  Behavioural and Psychological Symptoms of Dementia
CAM  Confusion Assessment Method
CAMCOG  Cambridge Cognitive Examination
CDT  Clock Drawing Test
CERAD  Consortium to Establish a Registry for Alzheimer’s Disease
CIND  cognitive impairment not dementia
CMAI  Cohen Mansfield Agitation Inventory
CVAE  cerebrovascular adverse event
DLB  dementia with Lewy bodies
DRS  Delirium Rating Scale
ECA  Epidemiologic Catchment Area
ECT  electroconvulsive therapy
EOS  early-onset schizophrenia
FAB  frontal assessment battery
FBE  full blood examination
FTD  frontotemporal dementias
GAD  generalized anxiety
HGA  hypothalamus–pituitary–gonadal
HPA  hypothalamus–pituitary–adrenal
HPI  history of present illness
IPA  International Psychogeriatric Association
LOS  late-onset schizophrenia
MAOI  monoamine oxidase inhibitor
MCI  mild cognitive impairment
MEG  magneto-encephalography
MMSE  Mini-mental State Examination
MoCA  Montreal Cognitive Assessment
Abbreviations

NMDA  \(N\)-methyl-d-aspartate
NSAID non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug
PDD Parkinson's Disease Dementia
PET Positron Emission Tomography
POA psychiatry of old age
RBF Regional Blood Flow
RCT randomized controlled trial
RUDAS Rowland Universal Dementia Assessment Scale
SPET Single Photon Emission Tomography
TCA tricyclic antidepressant
TIA transient ischaemic attack
VaD vascular dementia
VBR Ventricular Brain Ratio
VLOSP Very-late-onset schizophrenia-like psychosis
WMH white matter hyperintensity