

Book review

***Chronotherapeutics for Affective Disorders: A Clinician's Manual for Light and Wake Therapy* By Anna Wirz-Justice, Francesco Benedetti, Michael Terman. Published by S. Karger AG, Basel, Switzerland, 2009 116 pp., US\$ 48. ISBN 978-3-8055-9120-1**

It is well known that existing treatment options for patients suffering from affective disorders is lacking in efficacy and even more in effectiveness. Thus, we should welcome new treatment modalities that have a good evidence base. This manual covers a field that has been subjected to scientific investigation for around 30 years but has not yet entered clinical practice: Chronotherapeutics – manipulations of biological rhythms and sleep that can rapidly improve affective disorders. The manual summarises the evidence and provides step-by-step practical guidance to clinicians on how to apply chronotherapeutics.

The large amount of research carried out in this field will probably come as a surprise to many clinicians. The key concept is controlled exposure to environmental and behavioural stimuli that act on the circadian clock and sleep in order to achieve a therapeutic effect. This makes it related to psycho-education and also sleep hygiene, but is much more instrumental.

The manual is divided into 15 chapters, covering basic chronobiology to provide the background and separate chapters devoted to treatment with light, sleep deprivation (renamed wake therapy as a more positive intervention) and sleep phase advance, as well as a separate chapter for their combined use.

The range of chronotherapeutic indications are given as: major depression, antepartum depression, premenstrual dysphoric disorder, bulimia nervosa, ADHD, dementia, Parkinson's disease, shift work and jet lag disturbance. The main focus is, however, on Major Depression where most of the research has been done.

The manual, even though short, is dense with information and the reader will need to read some chapters carefully to grasp the basic concepts. However, if taking this effort, a whole new insight into the mechanics of affective disorders emerges. This especially holds true for the introduction chapter with

defines key concepts such as the circadian timing system in the CNS, the concept of entrainment, internal and external synchronisation of rhythms, and effects of light and melatonin on the circadian system and sleep.

The Appendix includes scales to assess chronotype and severity of depression, mood logs, and information for using chronotherapeutics in out-patients. These scales are also available on the website of the Center for Environmental Therapeutics in 13 languages so far (www.cet.org).

The essence of the manual is that through the use of chronotherapeutics, patients are given a different treatment modality (that does not preclude use of conventional antidepressants), and with this a chance of faster recovery. Having used the principles myself in a controlled study I am convinced that these methods provide good results. In my opinion we are only at the beginning of utilising these individual therapeutic elements in clinical practice, and there is still a lot of research to be done especially regarding the question as to who will benefit and who will not. This question is intimately connected to knowing more about intrinsic mechanisms underlying depression and thus basic research is much needed. However, we do not stop using antidepressant drugs because we are ignorant of their mechanisms of action. Similarly, I think we should begin trying out the chronotherapeutic interventions even though we do not know how they work.

I can warmly recommend reading this book and using it as a manual to guide the first steps. Readers will probably need some time to reflect over this new approach and want to see the methods carried out in a clinical setting. There is no reason not to begin. I have seen these methods work wonders in some patients. One patient in our study felt like 'waking up from a long period of retardation and seclusion from the world.'

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