

Book Reviews

BEYOND PSYCHIATRIC EXPERTISE. By B Bursten. Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas, 1984. 256 pp. \$28.50.

Reviewed by Martin Blinder, MD

I am gratified to report that Bursten's book consists of a scholarly criticism of the burdens placed upon the forensic psychiatrist by society. He concludes that the finding of mental illness can be standardized but that the measurement of the effects of such mental illness upon a particular bit of behavior cannot, in a clinical sense. Any attempts to do so depend upon social policy, not psychiatric expertise. He then proceeds to offer a wonderful example.

Dr. Bursten follows with a discussion of criminal responsibility, commitment to mental hospitals, the patient's desire to refuse treatment, guardianship of the elderly, the desire to nullify contracts based upon "unsound mind," requests for leaves of absence because of mental illness, and disability and personal injury situations wherein the designation of sickness is desirable and rewarding. Throughout, the author analyzes society's purposes in posing the question of whether a behavior results from mental illness and offers guidelines on how psychiatrists may participate in the decision-making process when the questions may be beyond their expertise.

He maintains that mental illness does exist and is measurable, but "is not a thing; it is a classic condition sharing certain characteristics. As such, it is not a matter of fact but a matter of (social) policy. People (as opposed to clinical absolutes) decide which conditions shall be included in the class and which conditions shall be excluded." Dr. Bursten argues that, although psychiatrists can make meaningful contributions to this decision-making process, ultimate responsibility for it rests with society as a whole. I am not sure an entire book was required to make this point, but it makes for interesting and provocative reading nonetheless.

LEGAL ENCROACHMENT ON PSYCHIATRIC PRACTICE. Edited by S Rachlin. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1985. 96 pp. No price available.

Reviewed by Melvin G. Goldzband, MD

The series, *New Directions for Mental Health Services*, whose editor-in-chief is H. Richard Lamb, has brought forth more than two dozen valuable monographs or collections. Rachlin's volume is a worthy companion to the previous publications.

As the book is read, it becomes apparent that it is not just another anthology but a very well-crafted and designed series of papers which highlight the current legal trends affecting the practice of American psychiatry. Moreover, the dis-