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Principles and practice of forensic psychiatry, 2nd edition

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The second edition of this standard volume “Principles and practice of forensic psychiatry”, first published in 1994 has been put on the market. The book quickly became a reliable guide for forensic psychiatrists even outside of the United States mainly through chapters dealing with basic problems of forensic medicine independent of the different legal conditions. In the last decade of the twentieth century, this field was characterized by important developments, one of them being new insights into neuroscience. Even the skepticism about the treatment of offenders and mentally ill lawbreakers had given way to the dawning of a new era. A reprint of the classic was thus impatiently expected. To what extent would these changes be included in the revised and expanded edition?

Whoever leafs through the unfortunately still unwieldy book will notice that the major chapters were transferred almost without changes to the new edition. Only a few were thoroughly revised or completely eliminated (as, for example, the comments on “Crime Scene Analysis and Investigative Profiling”), others, on the other hand, were newly added. Some of the new and thoroughly revised chapters are particularly interesting to European readers, since they give an idea of the type of problems forensic psychiatrists even outside of the United States may be confronted with in the future. For example, the chapter on “Novel mental orders” is very instructive, if one believes that American developments will eventually also be observed in Europe. It primarily demonstrates the American character of the book which does not hesitate to openly take a stand on purportedly new disorders or psychiatric

diagnoses based mainly on popular science. A German manual would have probably referred to the psychopathological tradition and avoided discussing fashionable diagnoses like “urban survival” and “television intoxication”. Also, the chapter on “sexual harassment” can only be understood in the context of social developments in the United States and largely reflects the discussion on “political correctness” without providing important new criminological or forensic insights.

Most changes in the reprint found in part 7 under “special clinical issues in forensic psychiatry” were made by Robert Weinstock. They clearly show the forensic psychiatric developments in recent years. For example, there is no reference to “multiple personality disorder” or “AIDS” any more. The comments on sexual offenders and their treatment were supplemented and expanded. New are among others comments on the use of imaging techniques in forensic psychiatry, addiction, the development of prognostic modules in risk assessment research and on stalking. The initial impression when reading these comments is that all facets of forensic psychiatry are dealt with because all the contributing authors are experts in their special field. However, it is nevertheless unclear why one or the other topic was selected while other areas are not represented. Since one chapter is devoted to discussing (probably because of specific laws in individual American states) the phenomenon of stalking, the question arises as to why there are no discussions on other, similar offences with problems of definition like hate crimes.

There is no conceptual revision of some parts of the book, thus making it difficult to read as a manual. However, based on the wealth of information provided, it is a very useful guide on individual problems and isolated aspects of forensic psychiatry even for European readers, although a more intensive study of secondary literature should not be dispensed with after scrutinizing the chapters on “Principles und practice of forensic psychiatry”.

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