

Book Reviews

Nutritional Influences of Illness CD-ROM

*Melvyn R. Werbach, Third Line Press Inc.
4751 Viviana Drive, Suite 500, Tarzana,
CA 91356, 1998 For single users: \$395 US;
multiple users: \$795*

I doubt many physicians and scientists interested in orthomolecular or nutritional medicine are unfamiliar with Dr. Werbach's series of remarkable books beginning in 1991 with *Nutritional Influences on Mental Illness*. I have always been impressed with the breadth and depth of the material covered in these books. For a newcomer to the field, and I hope we have many thousands of newcomers since orthomolecular medicine is at last sweeping into medicine, these books are essential.

This new compilation on CD ROM has all the virtues of Werbach's books and the additional advantage that one can call up any data even more quickly than one can by looking at the index of the books and leafing through the book. Here are a few statistics: The information is updated and expanded through 1997. It took 12 years to develop, covers roughly 4000 print pages, offers information on more than 100 diseases.

It is easy to use. One can call up reports by authors whether in the title or in the body of the report. One can review diseases to determine which nutrients have been helpful, or nutrients and their relationships to disease. It includes editorial comments on many of the reports which I think are helpful. It provides a very useful service especially since the major abstracting journals do not refer to most of the nutritional literature they consider alternative.

It is impossible to check on the accuracy of all of these abstracts for fields outside of one's own main interest. I have done so for a few of the reports dealing with my work, particularly with folic acid, niacin and the very good section on vitamin C and cancer. I found these abstracts accurate. Thus I do recommend to medical libraries and to

everyone else interested in this fascinating and rapidly growing field that they obtain this new CD-ROM for themselves.

A. Hoffer, M.D., Ph.D., FRCP(C)

5-HTP. Nature's Serotonin Solution.

*R. Sahelian. Avery Publishing Group,
Garden City Park, New York, NY
Soft Cover, 210 pages, 1998*

5-HTP is 5 hydroxy tryptophan, a derivative of the well known essential amino acid, tryptophan. Tryptophan must be present in our food as our bodies don't have the capacity to make it. If it were not available we would all die. Pellagra, a vitamin B3 deficiency disease, might equally well have been described as a tryptophan deficiency disease since the pellagra producing diets usually were very low in protein containing adequate amounts of this important amino acid.

Tryptophan in the United States has been removed from health food stores on the flimsy justification that it might be dangerous because a bad batch of the product made in Japan contained an impurity. It is available in drug stores that prepare prescriptions and it was always available in Canada by prescription but was removed from health food stores on equally flimsy charges that at some time in the distant future it might prove to be toxic. This, in spite of the finding by an expert committee on amino acids, that it was non toxic. The Health Protection Branch blithely ignored this finding since it did not fit in with its agenda to take these nutrients away from the free market.

So since tryptophan is no longer as freely available nor as inexpensive, the health food industry has swung toward the use of its major derivative 5-HTP. Much lower dosages of this substance are active

compared to tryptophan. Usually the dose ranges from 50 to 500 mg per day or more. 5-HTP is the precursor to the neurotransmitter serotonin. Serotonin has an interesting history from the time thirty years ago when it was first suggested it might have important neurotransmitter properties. This was based on the idea that LSD was a serotonin antagonist. At the time this was a curious idea. Now it is part of the establishment of ideas and whole new classes of drugs are designed based on this point of view. The major antidepressants are involved, in one way or another, in the use and re-storage of serotonin.

Dr Sahelian provides a quick review of the properties of this compound, based upon his own self-experimentation with it, his use of it in his practice and an extensive review of the literature. It is very safe, at least in short term use. There are no reported deaths. In one case a person took a 9 gram dose with no harmful side effect. It has not been available long enough to know what decades of use might do. It does appear to be a very interesting and useful addition to the field of mood elevators or stabilizers. According to the author, it is already reasonably well established for the following conditions: obesity, depression, anxiety, insomnia and fibromyalgia. I consider depression and anxiety merely aspects of a mood disorder. Each condition is described with doses, combination with herbs or other natural products, as well as with drugs. I will not summarize these because before it is used the reader should read the entire book.

5-HTP is a useful addition to natural products that are helpful in restoring and maintaining good health and this book by Dr Sahelian is a very useful addition to our literature by providing the reader information required to use this compound intelligently.

A.Hoffer, M.D., Ph.D., FRCP(C)

Natural Medicine Handbook for People Over 50

*Merrily Manthey, The Foundation for Excellence in Health Care, Kent, WA
Softcover, 42 pages, 1998.*

Merrily Manthey, M.S., produced the film "A Message of Hope" subtitled, "Mental Health and the Power of Natural Medicine." This excellent film runs 16 minutes and features a number of patients including two of mine who responded well to orthomolecular treatment methods. This film was screened at the 1998 Nutritional Medicine Today Conference in Vancouver and again to the Annual meeting of the American Association of Naturopathic Physicians in Portland this year.

Manthey's *Natural Medicine handbook for People over 50* explains why we must be unhappy with the present state of medicine. She introduces the subject matter which is that of natural medicine, which I consider to be orthomolecular medicine, which combines the best of modern medicine and natural medicine as the treatment of choice. The author illustrates this by discussing a few common conditions such as hardening of the arteries and the old but recently revived homocysteine view. The other five conditions are arthritis, back pain, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and depression. In Section 3, Manthey provides the basics of sound nutrition as developed by the leaders in natural medicine. Vitamins and minerals are discussed followed by the process of digestion, the importance of stress management, of exercise and the dangers of habits such as smoking. There is a chapter on some alternatives to drugs. For example, it costs about \$8.00 per month for enough niacin to normalize all the blood fats. It lowers the toxic cholesterol fractions, lowers triglycerides, elevates the good cholesterol fractions. It increases life because it

decreases mortality. None of the patented drugs which cost between \$50 and \$150 per month have these beneficial properties, Finally there is a section on premature senility.

Manthey agrees as do most of the pioneers in this area that people will live a lot longer if they take matters into their own hands and practice the principals outlined in this handbook. I think this is a great handbook, even for children, but the title does suggest, and with this I agree, that it is not too late even after 50 to take charge of your health.

Often after I have outlined to my patients the program they should follow. I ask them in jest why they have not asked me what are the dangers of following this program, They are startled and then ask, "OK what are the risks?" I reply that the main risk is that they will live longer and feel better. They smile and say "I think I can live with that!" The main danger in reading this little handbook is just that, you will feel better and live longer.

A.Hoffer, M.D., Ph.D., FRCP(C)