

David Harris went to medical school with them both. Ha!) and writes a panegyric for Bamber Gascoigne who comes across as the kindest and brightest person one could meet. Gascoigne devised the questions for *University Challenge* and always looked as if he knew the answers – because he did.

Frayn's books are witty, profound, sad and beautifully written. Much of the 'fiction' is based on his life (as is everyone's). What a life – *The Russian Interpreter* comes from his time as a Russian interpreter; he learned the language in two months. *Thinks!* and *The Human Touch* are accessible philosophical works. He has written plays (try *Noises Off*) and the script for the John Cleese vehicle *Clockwise*, based on a tutor's need for punctuality and also hilarious. Seeing *Noises Off* at the Coliseum 40 years ago was one of the most joyous experiences ever – only to be capped a year later seeing Dario Fa's *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*.

If you already read Frayn you will be delighted. If not you should. For G-d's sake, you can get it for three and a half quid.

Egalitarian Publishing was honoured to publish Penny Priest's *Team of One*. It came out just before Xmas 2024 but postal delays and the exigencies of a new distributor meant that the numerous copies ordered only popped through letter boxes in mid-January and later. Priest describes the state of services (both oncology and psychology) in the UK's National Health Service and the constraints due to lack of funding and a pre-occupation with psy diagnoses and short-term therapies that

we all face. *Team of One*, itself, is presented as a TV show that brings people together more than any group therapy ever could – not unlike the way that school-children in the 'seventies delighted in relaying Monty Python sketches (that few of us understood). It's a brilliant book – as so few are nowadays.

Which brings me on to both *Psycho-musicology* and *La Bergerie*, both from Egalitarian Publishing and both by – modesty prevents more.

Craig Newnes

**The Maudsley®
Deprescribing Guidelines:
Antidepressants,
Benzodiazepines,
Gabapentinoids and
Z-drugs**

Mark Horowitz & David M. Taylor
Wiley Blackwell, 2024, £49.99
ISBN 978-1-119-82298-1

Mark Horowitz, a training psychiatrist with a PhD in the neurobiology of depression and the pharmacology of antidepressants at the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience at King's College London, and David Taylor, Director of Pharmacy and Pathology at the South London and Maudsley NHS Trust and Professor of Psychopharmacology at Kings' College in London, offer a 568 pages guide to the

de-prescribing of those drugs mentioned in the book title. They say the book is for situations where de-prescribing is, on balance, jointly agreed between prescribers and patients in the best interests of the latter and the better option than continued prescribing.

According to the authors, the book mainly addresses psychiatrists, GPs, pharmacists, nurses, medical trainees, and interested members of the public, but less so patients. Nonetheless, they also can find information on each individual substance of the product classes, their trade names (mainly 2-3 UK and USA ones), their possible withdrawal effects, peak plasma, half-life, available formulations, off-label options and suggested taper schedules. As pharmaceutical companies rarely offer product units required for small-step withdrawal, the information provided on off-licence options for making small doses of psychotropic drugs, dispersing tablets and opening capsules to count beads is of great importance; it is a pity that there is no broader information about the tapering strips offered by a Dutch pharmacy.

A tapering strip, according to a doctor's prescription and suitable for hyperbolic reduction, is 'medication on a roll' for 28 days. A tapering trajectory can last 28 or a multiple of 28 days, using one or more tapering strips. Each prescribed daily dose is separately packaged and is composed of one or a limited number of capsules or tablets of different strengths (see www.taperingstrip.com). But, as Horowitz tells us, he uses liquids in his clinic for withdrawal, because tapering strips are

not covered by the health system in the UK, and he is experienced in using liquids for risk-reduced tapering. Beside this, tapering strips are not as easy to order in the UK as in the European Union countries due to Brexit and associated customs and other bureaucratic formalities. Horowitz also suggests that doctors have mostly been socialised to save money and to not use liquids, even if these would be much easier to reduce than tablets.

An important problem when withdrawing prescribed psychotropic drugs is certainly the fact that doctors usually administer drug combinations. The book deals with this topic only on half a page, probably due to the meagre data available. A look at the non-English specialist literature would be helpful here, for example, the first scientifically based article "Reduzieren und Absetzen von Psychopharmakakombinationen" ("Reducing and discontinuing psychotropic drug combinations") mainly written by the German psychiatrist Jann E. Schlimme (see www.peter-lehmann.de/docu/combi.htm). Perhaps the authors can incorporate more of this important aspect into a subsequent edition.

As Horowitz has personal experiences especially with antidepressant withdrawal, it is understandable that these drugs play the main role in the book – the volume might be too large if neuroleptics (so-called antipsychotics) were also included. There are other books which deal with withdrawal from neuroleptics.

Nevertheless, apart from the few limitations mentioned, the information

provided by Horowitz and Taylor should be extremely helpful and represent an important step towards providing competent help in withdrawal from prescribed psychotropic drugs. In the case of withdrawal from antidepressants, benzodiazepines, gabapentinoids and Z-drugs, supportive professionals now have a remarkable source of information to help them overcome their own fears about withdrawal support and provide their patients with extremely helpful assistance.

Peter Lehmann