

The Balanced Brain: The Science of Mental Health

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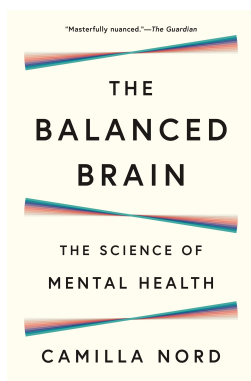
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Book Title: The Balanced Brain: The Science of Mental Health

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As family physicians are increasingly expected to manage the mental health concerns of patients, improved resources are beneficial to provide additional expertise on this challenging area of practice.¹ Camilla Nord's *The Balanced Brain* provides useful insight into the workings of mental health, framing the topics into informative, yet readable (and enjoyable) sections of a well-written book.

Dr Nord is an accomplished neuroscientist who leads the Mental Health Neuroscience Lab at the University of Cambridge; with this expertise, she drafts chapters that delve into such complex themes as neurochemistry, psychopharmacology, and psychotherapy. At the core of Dr Nord's thesis is a focus on attaining balance in brain operations (hence the book's title!), finding this balance in the many systems that dictate the equilibrium that drives mental function, or dysfunction.

The topics are approached in an accessible way that reads differently than many of the courses that filled the curricula of our medical school training; a practicality in the method feels higher yield when reading through its chapters. While the book does not spare detail with regard to the development of modern practices (including a thorough complement of references), it is written in a way that allows it to be simultaneously palatable to those readers without expertise or experience in the mental health field. This approach should be a great benefit for primary care readers, because it provides a helpful starting point for future discussions with patients about the underpinnings of their mental health conditions. A particularly enjoyable section of the book to read, as a primary care physician, was the exploration into the mental health benefits of the lifestyle changes that are often referenced in our interactions with patients. Dr Nord explores the evidence behind the effects of exercise, diet, and sleep habits on mental health, providing a framework for enhancing these conversations during future patient encounters.

The book not only touches on the past and the present, but also provides important insight into the potential future of behavioral medicine, with such emerging treatments as psychedelics and neuromodulation. Providing an early perspective for future possibilities provides readers with a foundation that can be built upon as new breakthroughs emerge.

The Balanced Brain is an informative, thought-provoking guide for any reader, but holds additional value for clinicians. The book provides the background and insight into the evidence that has fueled many of our standardized practices, while also commenting on their shortcomings. Dr Nord looks to a better future for mental health care, with improvements coming via personalized care approaches and enhanced treatment modalities.

REFERENCES

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