New Models for Depression

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Preface

The way we approach depression scientifically depends on our theoretical framework for depression and its aetiology, and on the tools at our disposal to investigate brain function. This means that models of depression will change with time. They have evolved particularly fast within the last few years, with the development of new imaging tools, such as functional MRI and TMS which are combined with the clinical method and experimental approaches to symptoms. This book brings together recent updates on the main themes of depression research, presented by active researchers in the field. Five of the chapters deal directly with brain imaging methods, either examining brain structure (Starkstein; Shah and Ebmeier), brain function (Schneider and Weiss; Elliott and Dolan; George), or functional neurochemistry (Ebert). A second topic, summarised by Murphy et al., is the renaissance of psychological approaches, both in terms of a neuropsychology of depression and as effective psychotherapy as an important adjunct to pharmacotherapy. Neurochemical models have a long pedigree in depressive illness. The recent years have seen a change from one-neurotransmitter explanations to delineating complex relationships and interactions. McAllister-Williams and Young explore one such interaction, that between stress hormones and serotonin. Finally, the behavioural animal models, described by Matthews and Reid, play an important part both in the scientific exploration of mechanisms involved in depression and in the development of effective treatments.

The limbic system, including the paralimbic cortex, has long been implicated in depression, but only recently has a convergence of evidence started to provide direct scientific support for this brain-behaviour relationship. Judging from the assembled results, the next decade promises to be exciting for depression research!

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