

**British General Practice** (1973). BARLOW, D. T. C.  
Pp. 182. London: H. K. Lewis & Co. Ltd.  
Price: £2.25.

This book is concerned in broad terms with reflections on clinical procedures, with professional relationships, and with practice organisation.

Its aim is 'to give an overall and detailed picture so that the student will have an insight into the methods and working of general practice and more important, how to care for his patient'. 'It was prepared' the foreword says 'for the use of students who were attached to his (the author's) practice' but will be read by 'a world wide circle of readers'.

It is, however, a disappointing book.

As a 'personal' statement the book is stamped with the author's background—of practice in the unhurried middle-class life of an English country town. It bears no marks of the pressures which are part of suburban and city culture. Yet it is here, of course, where the majority of patients in Britain live, work and die: and it is to this that practice must be adaptable if it is to have much relevance.

Perhaps it is this background that accounts for some arresting statements. For example, 'Another somewhat unsatisfactory cause of illness may be venereal disease, which occasionally presents itself to the general practitioner' or 'Rarely will the conditions of the household, absence of suitable relatives for nursing purposes or the exigencies of the disease necessitate admission to hospital'. It also leads to a chapter on 'aetiology and prognostication' which contains no discussion whatever of environment, social patterns, or interpersonal conflict, as causes of illness.

The chapter on psychiatry is equally frustrating. Many of Dr Barlow's readers will have found the assessment and management of behavioural problems a most demanding facet of practice. They will not find much help here. 'It is not difficult', he writes 'in such cases to give some comfort'. . . . 'One point worth mentioning in such cases is that doctor should consider what the patient wants him to do and then, provided that it is not harmful, have the grace and kindness to do it'. . . . But nevertheless'. . . it is especially important by reason of the great frequency with which the general practitioner comes into contact with psychiatric illness that he should refer his patients so affected sooner rather than later'.

The subtitle 'a guide for students' is misleading—since much of the ground with which the book is concerned is appropriate to postgraduate training but is not appropriate to undergraduate education. Thus, for example, the book has a major preoccupation with practice organisation and the author has some sensible things to say about buildings, equipment, appointments and partnerships. While this may, however, be of help to the trainee, it is certainly not the diet best suited

to 'give the student a wide and intimate insight into the method of general practice'.

It is, indeed, the early chapters on practice method ('diagnosis', 'consultation', 'visiting'—for example) which will probably provoke the most exasperation. There are many dubious, but often categorical, statements (e.g. 'Telling his patient something about his symptoms may often present difficulties. . . . The least that is said the soonest it is mended'. 'When the intelligence of the patient fails to understand the problems, it is often well to prescribe some simple medicine to go with it'). And there is a preoccupation with etiquette and 'decorum' that many will find unnecessarily pedantic (e.g. who precedes who, in 'the correct procedure at a domiciliary consultation').

Not unexpectedly, the final word is on private practice.

There will be many readers who prefer to look elsewhere for an account of British General Practice; and not a few who will feel slightly disturbed at the prospect of this picture being presented to a 'world wide circle'.

H. J. WRIGHT

**Lifeline telephone service for the elderly—an account of a pilot project in Hull.** P.p. 26.  
GREGORY, PETER and YOUNG, MICHAEL.  
A National Innovations Centre Booklet.  
Price: 60p.

The Hull Corporation is unique in operating a telephone system outside the General Post Office monopoly. Its welfare department has for several years run a special scheme of reduced rental, with 300 free calls per year, for poor and housebound old people. Hull therefore selected itself for this pilot project to examine the effects of providing a free telephone service for 100 old people of restricted mobility, in most cases living alone.

The report is an interesting and entertaining document, answering eight key questions the investigators set themselves. The answers obtained were not always what one might expect. For instance, the telephone apparently did not result in more calls for doctors than before.

The authors are to be commended in writing a report from which the reader can emerge with a clear grasp of the findings, and respected for urging caution against treating their results as conclusive. Yet, they rightly feel able to make recommendations, and these are of value to all those concerned with The Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act of 1970 which makes the provision of a telephone service mandatory, and indeed a service of high priority. The Hull findings show that this provision is fully justifiable in a civilised State, and this report will be of interest to all general practitioners, district nurses, health visitors, and welfare services department personnel.

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