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# BOOK REVIEWS

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## ESSENTIAL EXERCISES FOR THE CHILDBEARING YEAR

Elizabeth Noble

John Murray  
London (1978)

175 pages. Price £2.95

Elizabeth Noble is an Australian physiotherapist specializing in obstetrics and gynaecology and practising in the USA. Her book is an easy-to-read manual for the expectant mother on how to take care of herself during pregnancy and the postnatal period.

She begins by explaining the anatomy of the musculature which supports the backbone and the intra-abdominal contents, and shows how these structures undergo increasing strain as pregnancy progresses. She stresses the importance of good posture and exercises in preventing some of the unpleasant symptoms and sequelae of pregnancy such as backache and pelvic floor laxity.

A whole chapter is devoted to the pelvic floor, which is important since most women are not so aware of the need to strengthen this area as they are of the need to improve their abdominal musculature post-partum. She warns of the consequences a slack pelvic floor may produce, such as urinary incontinence, vaginal prolapse, and reduced sexual enjoyment. The exercises, especially those for the abdominal musculature, are well illustrated and easy to follow and those exercises which are inadvisable to do, such as straight leg raising, are illustrated crossed out.

In addition to exercises for fitness, techniques for relaxation to cope with labour are described. These are similar to those taught in hospital antenatal relaxation classes and by the National Childbirth Trust.

As the author herself says, this book should not take the place of attendance at preparation classes, where the practising of relaxation and breathing techniques in the company of other expectant parents is beneficial and where there is an opportunity to discuss personal worries and fears with other members of the group. I feel, however, that this book would be a helpful adjunct to such classes for easy reference at any time, especially for its advice concerning the postnatal period which often tends to be neglected in classes.

The book is certainly to be recommended to any woman starting her childbearing and at £2.95 it is not beyond most pockets.

SUSAN STUBBINGS

## QUEST FOR EXCELLENCE IN MEDICAL EDUCATION

Sir George Pickering

Oxford University Press  
Oxford (1978)

100 pages. Price £4.50

Sir George Pickering is particularly well qualified to survey medical education in the British Isles because after getting a double first at Cambridge he taught biology at Westminster School, was Secretary of the Royal College of Physicians' Committee on Medical Education in the early 1940s, and subsequently became a Professor of Medicine in London and Oxford, and a Fellow of the Royal Society. He has also watched three of his four children going through a medical education.

This survey was commissioned by the Nuffield Provincial Hospitals Trust and looks at undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education. Sir George made it his business to hear the views of students and records that he has always been particularly interested in them.

General practitioners will be pleased to read: "I have been greatly impressed with the enthusiasm of both teachers and taught in the [vocational training] schemes with which I have become familiar in the course of this survey. They are producing a new breed of general practitioner which, in my opinion, will be much superior to anywhere in the world and of course much better than their predecessors. I also had the opportunity to see something of the schemes of training for primary care in the United States. These tend to be based on universities and teaching hospitals, and not on family practice, and are in my opinion inferior to those that have been developed in this country."

Sir George's main conclusions are that there has been a serious tendency to swamp medical students and young graduates with factual knowledge, and he records much evidence from those who claimed they had become bored with their courses. He emphasizes

throughout the importance of instilling habits of self-education and of kindling the flame of interest, rather than saturating it with masses of information.

He believes, and surely few will differ from him, that the purpose of the undergraduate period is to train the student's mind and he believes that this objective is now attained only "by a minority of medical graduates".

He is convinced that "the value or otherwise of a medical education depends more perhaps on the attitude of mind of the teachers than on the details of the curriculum", and he fears that the "efficiency of the bureaucratic control" may dampen the progress of medical innovators in the future.

He supports the role of the General Medical Council in taking a co-ordinated view of the whole of medical education but protests continuously "at the growing regimentation of the doctor in training". In particular he takes numerous swipes at the current wisdom of concentrating on multiple choice questions, and argues his case with an interesting appendix from the Science Masters Association report, which suggests that a second paper is needed which should test the candidate's ability to organize information, argue a case, and communicate his thoughts clearly.

This book will be of interest to those concerned with medical education and as such should interest general practitioner trainers. It is, of course, required reading for course organizers, regional advisers, postgraduate deans, and all those concerned with undergraduate medical education.

D. J. PEREIRA GRAY

## A GUIDE TO GENERAL PRACTICE

Oxford Trainee Group

Blackwell Scientific Publications  
Ltd

Oxford (1979)

111 pages. Price £1.80

Ten doctors who have recently completed their vocational training have written an excellent manual describing the operation of general practice in the United Kingdom.

On my introduction to general practice I can remember being rather overwhelmed by the bureaucracy which