

addicted in general practice are those doctors who prescribe so profligately when they must know that medication can have at best only a marginal influence on their patients' problems. The whole of our work as general practitioners turns on our sense of proportion and sense of timing and he observes that many patients may be difficult to help in any other way than by a form of demand feeding.

This is a stimulating book whose teachings our trainees badly need but which perhaps only veterans can properly savour. The author believes a doctor's job is to help patients become more self-reliant. With the present-day mania for making a medical issue of every distress and disorder, and for professionalizing every gesture of help, his viewpoint, as he despondently admits, is unfashionable; and he doubts there can be many who share it. Let's hope that in this he is wrong.

J. S. NORELL

SELF-CARE IN HEALTH

John D. Williamson and Kate Danaher

*Croom Helm
London (1978)*

193 pages. Price £8.95

The illness 'iceberg' is now a familiar concept in primary care although the metaphor has perhaps become overstretched as the greater unseen part of the iceberg concerns not only asymptomatic and unrepresented illness but also health and the complex relationship between health and illness. A number of earlier publications have described individual facets of the iceberg's base, but here at last is a complete concise guide to its underwater geography. The water is often murky, as the authors are quick to point out, so that many areas remain uncharted.

This book is a thoughtful review of the literature of self-care in health, the place of self-care in the Health Service, and illness behaviour. The end chapters look for a policy for self-care and discuss its relationship to professionalism. There is an excellent bibliography and reference list.

The authors are a general practitioner and a sociologist who have both been associated with the Department of General Practice at Guy's Hospital Medical School. They have written for a wide audience, but many general practitioners may be disappointed that the impression left by the later chapters is of a rather uncertain prospective for

self-care policies which is inevitably coloured by the clearly described gaps in basic knowledge. Whilst non-medical readers may be unaware of these gaps, many of us are only too keenly aware of them and may need more positive encouragement to seek out local needs, to mount and evaluate self-care projects, or to co-operate with existing self-care ventures.

Like other Croom Helm publications this short book seems to be cheaply produced and printed and yet not cheap to buy. Nevertheless, it must now be an essential starting-point for anyone interested in self-care. This book should be in every postgraduate library and on all trainees' reading lists. It may also be commended to interested health visitors and district nurses.

SIMON SMAIL

THE MRCGP EXAMINATION A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO PREPARATION AND PASSING

*A. J. Moulds, T. A. I. Bouchier
Hayes, and K. A. H. Young*

*MTP Press Ltd
Lancaster (1978)*

131 pages. Price £4.95

This little book, written by three service officers who are associated with a very successful MRCGP course, is no more and no less than a very comprehensive guide to the preparation and passing of the MRCGP examination, as the title describes. It is well written, logically laid out, mercifully free of jargon, and full of useful bits of information for candidates. Each section of the examination is described in detail, and in addition the writers offer the kind of useful tips which clearly reflect their own practical experience. The section on the multiple choice question paper is particularly helpful, because it gives the reader a better idea of the nature and standard of questions asked in this part of the examination than anything the College has made available to candidates so far.

Incidentally, since the book is solely about the examination and how to pass it, it leaves the meaning of continuing membership of the College undiscussed. This omission, quite proper in a book about the examination, nevertheless helps to highlight an unresolved question of great importance. Should the College distinguish between those doctors who pass the examination simply to gain a higher qualification and those who pass it in order to enter into the rights and obligations of active

membership in addition? The writers of the book have simply made it more difficult for the Council of the College to postpone a decision much longer, and to this end they may have done both the College and general practitioners at large a service they had not planned for.

Every prospective examination candidate would be silly to consider taking the examination without first investing in this modestly priced volume. It is also a must for trainers, who ought to know about the examination, whether they are members of the College or not. Lastly, I believe that many ordinary College members will enjoy reading it, and doing some of the practical tests in the reassuring privacy of their own homes, if only to find out more precisely what their panel of examiners is up to in this still rather controversial field of assessment.

DONALD IRVINE

DIABETES EXPLAINED 3RD EDITION

Arnold Bloom

*MTP Press Limited
Lancaster (1978)*

159 pages. Price £5.50

In his preface to the third edition the author says: "It is my earnest hope that this book will continue to prove instructive to those who have diabetes and to those who help to look after them". I have no doubt that it will.

Since it is aimed mainly at diabetic patients and nurses, rather than general practitioners, the author has rightly concentrated on practical aspects of management and avoided biochemical detail.

The section on the tablet treatment of diabetes is particularly well written but I was disappointed with the sections on insulin treatment and the management of diabetic coma. In these, the conflicting needs of the doctor and the lay reader have not been reconciled, but in fairness it is difficult to see how they could have been in a book of this type.

The section on children with diabetes is written with compassion and understanding but general practitioners might well feel that a more aggressive approach to good control in this age group would have been better.

Whilst the book will certainly help the patients and nurses for whom it was intended, general practitioners who wish to broaden their knowledge in order to improve their management of diabetic patients would do better to look elsewhere.

C. WAINE