time patients reach him the other eye has been affected, but it shows how blind hospital doctors can be to the highly selected nature of their workload.

When I was a student I had to learn a long list of causes of lower back pain but in practice I see about one patient a day with back pain and in most instances I don't know the cause. X-ray examination, when it is carried out, is usually negative. The back is clearly stiff and painful from a contraction of the longitudinal muscles of the spine, but I do not know what the cause of that spasm is. I can make up theories, but what good is that?

There is a great deal of medical ignorance accumulating between the general practitioners' and the consultants' range of interest. The general practitioner does not see enough cases or cannot investigate his cases sufficiently to get sound knowledge, and the consultant sees a population which has already been highly selected. Why is there no feedback to medical students? Why cannot they be taught lists of causes which bear some relation to reality rather than the gleanings of ancient textbooks?

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DEFINING PARADIGM

Sir,
"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less." How pleasant it is that Humpty Dumpty has still a disciple 108 years later in the person of Dr B. R. Barnett (September *Journal,* p. 520) who writes (p. 521): "Paradigm is here used to mean an accepted body of scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners."

Dr Barnett later admits (p. 524) to ownership of the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary*. I have only the *Concise*. Here it is laid down that a paradigm is "an example, pattern, especially of inflexion of noun, verb, etc.".

If Dr Barnett is as keen as he says "that doctors in their dealings with patients should not persist in error", he should use his dictionary more assiduously.

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BOOK REVIEWS

ON THE STATE OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH FOR THE YEAR 1977

Department of Health and Social Security

HMSO, London (1978)
129 pages. Price £2.50

The annual review of the Department of Health and Social Security is always worth reading because it provides in compact form basic information about developments in the National Health Service, not always easily found in other documents.

In the manpower section this report shows that British general practice is still failing to recruit British-born male doctors, and in 1977 increased the number of these in England and Wales only by 16. There were, however, increases in the number of male overseas doctors (153) and female doctors born in Great Britain (116); thus the total number of unrestricted principals in general practice in England and Wales increased by 263.

The total number of principals born overseas now forms 19.5 per cent of all principals. By comparison there was an increase of 881 hospital doctors including 120 new consultants. In 1977, 15 per cent of consultants were born overseas, over a quarter of all senior registrars, and over half of both registrars and senior house officers.

The report states that "a requirement to undertake at least one year in general practice as a trainee may be introduced before then [1981]" and that "although the regulations have not been introduced, the number of doctors training for general practice continues to increase by about 100 a year. On 1 October 1977 there were 941 doctors in their general practice trainee year and the number of trainers rose to over 1,500.

It is clear that the training programme is now reasonably in balance because the total number of those entering general practice for the first time in 1977 was 1,101.

In 1977, the infant mortality rate fell to 13.7 per thousand live births, and the perinatal mortality fell to 16.9. The standard mortality ratio has been used as the index for international comparisons and the conclusion is that the level of mortality in England and Wales puts us at the mid-point or marginally into the top half of the rank order of the selected countries.

In an interesting table on the principal causes of death in 1977 based on standard mortality ratios, taking 1968 as 100, the main diseases in which there has been a deterioration include "carcinoma of the oesophagus, 114; other malignant neoplasms, 111; and of the trachea, bronchus, and lung, 110".

Other diseases in which mortality ratios have deteriorated include aortic aneurysm, 118; cirrhosis of the liver, 118; and nephritis and nephrosis, 117.

Among the conditions in which there have been the greatest and most important improvements are influenza, 24; complications of pregnancy, childbirth, and the puerperium, 35; and tuberculosis of the respiratory system, 34.

Other interesting improved rates include bronchitis, emphysema and asthma, 63; suicide and self-inflicted injuries, 82; and peptic ulcer, 88.

Dominating the causes of death is ischaemic heart disease which still forms more than a quarter of deaths from all causes, and in which there has been virtually no change in the standardized mortality ratio.

New claims for sickness and invalidity benefits showed a reduction of five per cent during the year and it was reported that the output of medical students exceeded 3,000 for the first time.

Laboratory services continued to increase, and the rate of increase in 1971 to 1976 averaged six per cent a year, with 8.6 per cent increase for chemical pathology. Simultaneously, the use made by radiology services increased by another 10 per cent in 1976.

D. J. PEREIRA GRAY

MEDICAL TEXTBOOK REVIEW 3RD EDITION

Victor Daniels and Steven White

Cambridge Medical Books
Cambridge (1979)
121 pages. Price £1

The compilers of this paperback are to be congratulated on their idea. Short reviews of about 1,000 medical textbooks, pre-clinical and clinical, are