

which will be useful to the general practitioner concerned with new methods for improving antenatal care.

B. ESSEX

# PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE IN THE USSR: THEIR TREATMENT AND CONDITIONS

*Amnesty International London*  
(1980)

217 pages. Price £2

The review copy of this book lay on my desk for quite some time, studiously neglected while I succeeded in finding other things to do, such is the distasteful aura surrounding its theme. This grim recounting of man's inhumanity to man is not for those with weak stomachs. The treatment meted out to 'enemies of the state'—those whose beliefs or non-violent behaviour have incurred the inveterate hatred of their tormentors—is rendered more odious by the way psychiatry and educational theory have been used to break their spirit and jeopardise their health.

We doctors are bound to feel involved on three counts. First, as human beings we can but pity the hardship borne by these luckless individuals. Secondly, as doctors we must be concerned about systematic under-nutrition and scanty provision for even basic diagnosis and treatment. The third, and by far the most important issue for us, is that psychiatry and some of its practitioners in the USSR have been harnessed to an evil purpose. A reader's first reactions might well be noncomprehension or disbelief: how can doctors get involved in such things?

This updated Amnesty International report quotes examples of diagnoses reached by officially appointed psychiatrists justifying compulsory hospitalization of dissenters: "psychopathy with tendency to litigation"; "nervous exhaustion brought on by her search for justice"; "schizophrenia with religious delirium"; "delusional ideas of reforms and struggle against the existing social and political system in the USSR"; "mania for reconstructing society". Anyone incautious enough to submit an official complaint about the way these cases are handled is liable to have a similar diagnosis applied to himself and to be forcibly detained, giving a new, grim meaning to the expression 'suitable case for treatment.' (Yury Belov was told that "they would treat him until he changed his opinion.")

Even if some of these dissenters are mentally unbalanced (and it could be

argued that they must be, to persist with their activities in spite of the near certainty of what will happen to them), by what hideous perversion can this justify their incarceration and 'treatment' against their will?

Perhaps the most depressing statement in the book is a quotation not from a dissident but from important Soviet psychiatrists in 1973: "The seeming normality of such sick persons when they commit socially dangerous actions is used by anti-Soviet propaganda for slanderous contentions that these persons are not suffering from a mental disorder."

Who are the insane ones?

J. S. NORELL

# A PRIMER OF PRIMARY CARE

S. C. Marshall and  
A. P. R. Eckersley

*Lloyd-Luke (Medical Books) Ltd*  
*London* (1980)

153 pages. Price £3.75

Not another textbook on general practice? This one is different in that it has been written specifically for trainees at the beginning of their trainee year. The Scottish authors—a trainer and his trainee—have chosen to concentrate on the organizational side of general practice, but I was still surprised to find so little on the clinical aspects of primary care. The first chapter consists of 13 pages on how to write prescriptions; other chapters cover, for instance, NHS forms, the Mental Health Act, the problems of partnerships and the MRCGP exam. There is a useful list of addresses of various relevant organizations, including many patient-help groups, and a good chapter explaining the various social security benefits.

Care has been taken to explain some of the differences in the way general practice is organized in Scotland, but, strangely, the variations that will affect trainees in Northern Ireland are not covered to the same extent. There is no description of the regulations concerning trainees' terms and conditions of service.

Some parts are distinctly amateur and, overall, there are several inaccuracies and rather more omissions. Readers will be disappointed at the low-key approach adopted: nowhere is there any reference to published research about general practice. Furthermore, I doubt that a medical student thumbing through the pages of this book in a library or bookshop would be inspired to contemplate a career in general practice.

Surely the time has come for a more intellectual approach. I am unable to recommend this book; trainees deserve something better.

PETER SELLEY

# EDUCATION FOR CHILDBIRTH AND PARENTHOOD

*Elizabeth R. Perkins*

*Croom Helm Ltd*  
*London* (1980)

180 pages. Price £10.95

At a time when there is a rising tide of discontent about obstetric care, this fascinating book brings little comfort. However, it should be a spur to action. Based on a series of research studies which evaluated the education provided for expectant mothers, it reveals an unmet need not for didactic instruction, introduction and routine explanation about pregnancy, labour, breast feeding and parentcraft, but for education. It should destroy doctors' complacency that their pregnant patients are being adequately taught these things by others while they get on with the "more important" business of monitoring fetal development and the mother's physical status. The nuclear family, in which the mother is deprived of the support and advice of her mother and mother-in-law, and, even more, the single-parent family, create needs that should be met by health professionals. Ms Perkins shows that these are not met, neither in the classes run specifically for the purpose, nor by most of the pamphlets, books or booklets with which expectant mothers are showered. After reading this, one is not surprised by the complaints of those women who feel that they are reduced to passive recipients of physical care, when what they want is to be informed participants in what should be a major life-event. This book should be in every practice library and read by every member of the primary health care team (even though, like most of this publishing house's books, it is overpriced).

D. H. H. METCALFE

# New editions

*Dictionary of Medical Ethics*, ed. Duncan, A. S., Dunstan, G. R. & Welbourn, R. B. Revised and enlarged edition. London: Darton, Longman and Todd. 459 pages. Price £12.50.

*Running a Practice*. Jones, R. V. H., Bolden, K. J., Gray, D. J. Pereira & Hall, M. S. (1981). 2nd edition. London: Croom Helm. 229 pages. Price £7.95.