
GENERAL PRACTICE LITERATURE

NEW BOOKS

TRAINING FOR GENERAL PRACTICE

D. J. Pereira Gray

Macdonald and Evans
Plymouth (1981)

336 pages. Price £9.95

The long-heralded introduction of compulsory vocational training is a good time for taking stock of what has been happening in the last couple of decades and for thinking about the future; few people are as well equipped as Pereira Gray for doing so. His passion for the subject and his desire to set down its legal, administrative, philosophical, political, historical and educational aspects shine out unmistakably in this small and pleasantly presented volume.

About a third of the work is devoted to bringing together a host of regulations, official recommendations, statistics, details of the machinery of administration and reading lists which have until now been scattered far and wide. Thanks to his enormous industry, many of us will be saved a great deal of time. Even in this dry area he permits himself some personal opinion, and I was cheered by the forthright way he criticizes the regulations governing permissible hospital training posts for being too flexible.

Another third is broadly educational. An exposition of theory reminds us of the relationship between aims, methods and assessment in the process of learning; teaching methods and assessment have later sections of their own, though the poverty of direct evidence in these fields prevents the author from offering much other than some useful check-lists. Discussing trainers' workshops and courses he points out that their significance may transcend their immediate task: in breaking down the isolation of general practitioners they can become a vehicle for continuing professional change. Rather too much space is given to the 1980 Trainees' Conference—the details have been published elsewhere and the important conclusions would have been enough. The chapter on the trainer-trainee relationship is disappointing, despite a few interesting ideas; there are no theories or even anecdotes to stimulate the imagination, and no real

attempt to explore the possibilities that suggest themselves.

The rest of the book has a varied content. There is a careful dissection of the factors which led to training becoming compulsory, but in the end the author seems more concerned to justify the outcome than to show how it came about. The chapter on general practice as an independent discipline is superfluous—nothing new is added, and that particular battle has anyway been won.

The historical section is very well done, the academic and political aspects being skilfully interwoven in a story of gathering momentum whose inevitable outcome was far from clear even five years ago. I had only two criticisms. While tribute is rightly paid to Pat Byrne's teachers' courses in Manchester, no mention is made of the parallel developments in Liverpool and at College HQ, which also started in 1966. The 1967 recommendations of the GMC defined basic medical education as ending with registration, not qualification—a difference that has both educational and political significance.

What does it all add up to? My own feeling is that Pereira Gray has attempted the impossible in trying to offer definitive statements about the present position on so many fronts—it may be too much for one man and it is too much for one book. There are bound to be further editions and these will give him a chance to refine his aims and concentrate his fire; meanwhile we must be grateful for an invaluable reference book that has many good things in it.

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PROBLEMS IN GERIATRIC MEDICINE

A. Martin

MTP Press
Lancaster (1981)

195 pages. Price £7.95

The care of the elderly is at present the major problem area in general practice. So it is entirely appropriate for this contribution to the Problems in Practice series to have been written by a practical physician who is closely associated with the local vocational training scheme in what is a mixed urban and rural area. The author has kept to the publisher's

brief and avoids irrelevances and minutiae. Furthermore, Tony Martin has been modest enough to call in experts in those fields, such as the modern management and understanding of urinary incontinence, in which he feels the reader could be best served.

The result is a book which is one of the better contributions to the series. In general the level of discussion is good, although compression inevitably leads to occasional oversimplification or even dogmatism. It remains, however, a short textbook and as such there are gaps which the general practitioner would wish to have been filled. For instance, skin problems are not mentioned, though it is clear to anyone in practice that these problems are distressing, dangerous and frequently bring the patient to the doctor. On the other hand, disorders of the cardiovascular system take up more than one third of the text, so that I regret now having bought the volume in the same series on *Problems in Cardiology*.

This is an excellent book, tightly written, compendious in its information and addressing itself to the part played by the family doctor. Yet, one feels it does not go far enough in describing how a team can work together, how preventive programmes might be achieved, and the vulnerable identified. The time must have come when books written by specialists for general practitioners fulfil only a partial need. The right balance must be struck between the specialists and those who are surrounded by the phenomena of ageing and who deal with 94 per cent of all elderly people, many of whom never enter a hospital. There is so much that might be written about functional classification of the elderly, rather than about identification of diseases. It may be trendy to talk of Mobitz type I block instead of the Wenckebach phenomenon, but it is more important to be informed that attacks of heart block may produce periods of deteriorated behaviour, or that the Huygens' "depressed kitchen" is often a more striking sign of depression to the average general practitioner than the well-known catalogue of vegetative cadences.

Of its kind, Tony Martin's book is excellent and can be recommended for trainers and their trainees. But there are now so many good recent books on geriatrics that we are beginning to need a bibliographical guide to the field.

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