

CHILD HEALTH IN A CHANGING SOCIETY

John O. Forfar (Ed)
Oxford University Press (1988)
 302 pages. Price £9.95

To mark its diamond jubilee the British Paediatric Association has produced a book which attempts to trace changes in child health over the last 60 years. In nine chapters a group of eminent paediatricians cover topics ranging from congenital abnormalities to ethical issues, from the care of newborn babies to the delivery of care for children, from child health in the environment to educational and social services for children. The progressive mastery of disease during this century has resulted in major changes in the nature of paediatric practice and the scourge of diseases such as poliomyelitis, tuberculosis and rheumatic fever has been eradicated. These changes are well described without swamping the reader in a mass of statistics.

Paediatricians and family doctors have much in common as both deal with families and are frequently faced with the relationship between ill health and social factors. Regrettably, this book makes scant reference to the role of general practitioners who are responsible for 90% of the medical care of children. There is little or no mention of the common complaints seen by general practitioners and health visitors and the dilemmas they face in dealing with these problems. This rather narrow approach highlights the fact that the book is dominated by the experiences of hospital specialists. A reflective chapter from an experienced general practitioner about changes in the medical care of children over the years would have produced the necessary balance which is lacking.

After 60 years the British Paediatric Association is alive and well and no one should underestimate the major advances in paediatrics during this time. However, it is disappointing that a publication sponsored by the association makes little more than a passing reference to the importance of the open access family doctor service in the medical care of children in this country.

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MEDICAL ETHICS AND ECONOMICS IN HEALTH CARE

Gavin Mooney and Alistair McGuire (Eds)
Oxford University Press (1988)
 156 pages. Price £20.00

The potential conflict between the doctor's responsibility to do the best for the individual patient and his or her wider responsibilities to society with respect to the allocation of resources is well covered in this symposium.

The starting point is a paper by the editors, both health economists, who argue that medical ethics is too individualistic, and that more emphasis should be given to maximizing wider social benefits, including factors other than those relating directly to health. In subsequent chapters this position is criticized, added to and modified by philosophers, other health economists, and medical practitioners.

The volume has a coherence often lacking in multi-author works, since it arose from a well-organized workshop where each paper was discussed in some depth. Some authors, however, make little allowance for the unfamiliarity of the technical terms of their discipline. The first chapter in particular is full of economists' language and reading it involved a constant effort of 'translation' which is likely to deter the non-specialist. This is particularly unfortunate since it is the peg on which the rest of the work hangs. Other chapters are clearer, but since the sym-

posium has a definite structure, reading chapters at random is unsatisfactory.

Although this is a valuable work for the academic specialist, it will find little appeal for the average medical reader. This is a shame as it covers an important area for all clinicians.

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DAUGHTERS WHO CARE

Daughters caring for mothers at home

Jane Lewis and Barbara Meredith
Routledge, London (1988)
 194 pages. Price £8.95

Despite a widespread belief to the contrary, relatives still provide the bulk of the support required by frail old people living in the community. The fact that the majority of the elderly are women, and that daughters form a significant proportion of informal carers, makes this one of the more important current feminist issues in health care.

Through detailed interviews with 41 daughters who have looked after their mothers for varying numbers of years, Jane Lewis and Barbara Meredith provide a fascinating account of the complexity of this particular caring relationship. The subject is relevant to the work of all general practitioners but it is likely that only those with a special interest will buy or find the time to read this specialist book. It would be a pity, however, if some of the challenging questions raised by the authors concerning the relationships between formal and informal care, and the contributions professional carers, including general practitioners, can make to support informal carers, do not find their way into the mainstream general practice literature.

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NOTES FOR THE MRCGP

K.T. Palmer
Blackwell Scientific Publications, Oxford (1988)
 233 pages. Price £12.50

Like any good examination candidate, when asked to review this book I had several options. I could read it assiduously from cover to cover, dip in here and there, or give it to my trainee to read a week before his orals for the MRCGP examination. I chose the last option with a little of the second. The advantage of this course of action is that I have tried the book out for what it was intended and the verdict is that it works; my trainee passed.

This up-to-date book is a concise guide to those areas of general practice often discussed in the College examination. It is packed with facts and helps to clarify the thoughts of the reader by giving advantages and disadvantages for each opinion. I hope that it will finally dispel the myth that there is an official 'College' answer to every question. The examination is designed to test the candidate's ability to consider several possible approaches and argue the pros and cons of each.

I would therefore recommend this book to any examination candidate.

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