

cellent but must of the rest of the book is designed as a management guide for residents, detailing common problems both neonatal and in later childhood along with most of the emergencies which a senior house officer will encounter. The handbook concludes with a summary of laboratory investigations and a guide to therapeutics.

The chapter on immunizations includes the best guide that I have seen to the rules of immunization expressed as algorithms explaining concisely and clearly when and when not to immunize in 1989. The chapter on child abuse is viewed from a ward window and not as a problem which is community based. Practical procedures are well described in another section although perhaps more emphasis could have been placed on making these pain-free for the child.

In the preface the authors describe their intention of writing a book for inexperienced medical staff whether in hospital, community or primary care. Unfortunately, *Handbook of paediatrics* does not prove a useful guide to paediatrics in primary or community care, although the authors have produced a useful handbook for hospital paediatrics. This is not what the book's title leads one to expect.

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## ALCOHOL PROBLEMS

Practical guides for general practice no. 5

P. Anderson, P. Wallace and H. Jones

Oxford University Press (1989)

86 pages. Price £5.95

The Royal College of General Practitioners' report *Alcohol — a balanced view* pioneered the idea of alcohol as a risk factor for all the population. It outlined the epidemiological importance of modifying the alcohol consumption of the large number people who drink heavily, from which it followed that more emphasis should be given to controlled drinking than abstinence. *Alcohol problems* is a practical and readable refinement of these ideas.

The relationship between alcohol, depression and anxiety is an important issue and I would have liked to have read more about that and also about helping patients at high risk, including the dangers of detoxification. The importance of the family is acknowledged but perhaps more practical advice could have been given about whether to see spouses (and/or families) together or separately. The section on preventive responses at national level is not practical and an 'alcohol continuation card' is mentioned but not its availability.

This is a good, brief guide to helping people misusing alcohol and to the management of the problem in general practice. I recommend it as an introduction to the subject for doctors and other members of the primary care team.

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## DEATH, DISSECTION AND THE DESTITUTE

Ruth Richardson

Penguin, London (1989)

426 pages. Price £5.99

During the rapid growth of medical education in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the study of anatomy based on dissection of the corpse was regarded as the cornerstone of medical knowledge. The only legal supply of corpses was hanged criminals and they were far too few, so that rival surgeons and relatives (who saw dissection as an additional punishment

to death) fought pitched battles for possession of the executed. Hence the growth of the trade in body-snatching. But even then, apart from the obvious risk of being caught, shovel in hand, there were difficulties in obtaining enough fresh corpses. So the body-snatchers often resorted to murder, which guaranteed freshness and saved a lot of digging. Public horror at such a state of affairs led to the anatomy act of 1832. As the accoucheur Robert Gooch saw it there were only three alternatives:

'to prohibit the study of anatomy altogether ... to support the breed of resurrection men, plunder graves, and after all, supply the nation with half-informed anatomists and surgeons ... [or] to give up unclaimed bodies to the schools of anatomy.'

But the unclaimed bodies were the bodies of the destitute, made available through the anatomy act. It was very much one law for the rich and one for the poor. The insensitive cruelty of the act was recognized by many at the time but justified in the name of the advance of medical science and education. The working classes, who set great store on a proper funeral and burial and hoped for a better life in the next world, reacted with understandable horror at the prospect of ending up on the anatomist's table. They reacted with anger at the ultimate degradation of dissection and had intense distrust of medical men and their institutions.

This is the bare bones of the story. Ruth Richardson has written what must be classed, deservedly, as a bestseller in the history of medicine. It is a grimly exciting story, extremely well written, and based on solid scholarly research. If the author's passionate anger at social injustice comes near to going over the top it is forgivable; her anger is the driving force that has created an extremely readable book.

IRVINE LOUDON

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## INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL AND HEALTH

Vaccination requirements and health advice

World Health Organization

WHO, Geneva (1989)

87 pages. Price Sw. Fr. 14

Cholera and yellow fever are the only two diseases for which countries may still require evidence of vaccination from visitors. This booklet lists the countries concerned, and details their legal requirements. All other immunizations are dealt with in a cursory manner that is of little help to the doctor trying to advise his patient. Of more use is the country by country account of the distribution of malaria. Unfortunately one of the recommended prophylactics, mefloquine, is not readily available in the UK.

One chapter provides a fascinating overview of the distributions of the main transmissible diseases throughout the world. After the lists of exotic tropical conditions a figure showing the estimated incidence of health problems in travellers restores the balance. The visitor to the tropics is 500 times more likely to be involved in an accident than to contract typhoid fever. Unfortunately the chapter that follows on avoidance of health risks contains some questionable advice.

I will continue to consult the Department of Health's publications *Immunization against infectious disease* and *Before you go* when advising my patients, and will recommend the Department of Health's *While you're away* and the British Medical Journal's *Well away: a health guide for travellers* for their use abroad.

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