

The author begins by commenting on the deterrent effect of prisons in society: he suggests that when the prison regime is hard criminals will be put off offending whereas when regimes are soft, crime rates will rise. Prisoners are punished by being deprived of their liberty and further punished by the harsh conditions in prisons. The author examines the development of the prison medical service from 1774 to the present day in the context of this perception of the role of prisons.

The author argues that doctors in prisons, rather than being the benevolent advocates of their patients' good, have been intimately involved in reinforcing the discipline of prison regimes. Examples of this include a review of the use of drugs in the control of prisoners and the use of medical diagnoses to classify deviant behaviour. Commenting on the management of women in prisons the author claims that the intervention of medical professionals is at least in part governed by the priorities of a particular prison, and this is claimed to be more often the case with women prisoners than with men.

This view of the role of the medical officer in British prisons is a deeply disturbing one, but no alternative is suggested. If this perception of the medical role in prison is justified, one is left wondering how much of a socially controlling role doctors play in society, particularly towards patients with a deviant life style.

EDWIN MARTIN
General practitioner, Bedford

TREATMENT AND PROGNOSIS: GENERAL PRACTICE
M Drury and R Hobbs (eds)
Heineman Medical, Oxford (1990)
364 pages. Price £30.00

This ambitious text is organized into conventional specialist systems and begins with a 'disease directory' for each body system. However, the authors are drawn from the ranks of general practice. Each section starts with a thumbnail sketch of epidemiology and conventional clinical features followed by subsections on progress, treatment and follow up. Two or three key references are included in each section. The style is concise and the information condensed for ready reference. The editors have succeeded in maintaining a remarkably consistent standard from their 21 contributors.

The text differs from others in the same series by a number of attempts to introduce the contextual and personal elements of 'treatment': the editors have tried to honour the principles of their discipline. Unfortunately, the compact nature of the book and the biomedical dominance of the series have almost squeezed out any family orientation to treatment. However, general practitioners will enjoy the quick and easy access to the information included.

N C H STOTT
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