

Book Reviews

Social Casework in a General Medical Practice. JOAN COLLINS, B.A.,
A.M.I.A. London. Pitman Medical Publishing Co., Ltd. 1965.
Pp. x + 219. Price 30s.

Medicosocial and personal problems command much attention in general practice, and are characteristically interwoven with clinical material; but they have attracted less academic study than they deserve, and formal training in their recognition and management hardly exists. Traditionally, personal medicine goes beyond clinical diagnosis and treatment of disease processes; but how many of us in general practice can be confident that we give good measure to patients whose illnesses are rooted in, or accompanied by, crippling personal or social difficulties? With the conquest of much organic disease behind, these factors in illness are coming in for more attention, and Miss Collins' book is therefore of outstanding interest to the medical profession as a whole, and to general practitioners in particular.

The book reports an experiment in medicosocial work in general practice. Miss Collins describes her attachment to a group practice in Cardiff as a medical social worker (née almoner) for one year, with a preceding pilot study in the same practice, and a succeeding follow-up study and social survey. The experiment was financed by the Nuffield Provincial Hospitals Trust, and associated with the University Medical Unit in Cardiff. One hundred and forty-six patients were referred to her during the year by partners of the practice; and in addition she assessed 173 patients from previously defined groups (e.g. patients with newly diagnosed malignant disease). Of these 319 patients, 60 were found to have no need of help and 45 were non-cooperators (these virtually all from the previously defined groups). The remaining 205 cases form the material of the study. Miss Collins presents an extensive analysis, from which emerges much factual information. It raises as many questions as it answers; but that it sheds light where light is needed is certain.

The best way to read this book is to start with the excellent and eminently readable chapter "Summary and Conclusions" (page 25), with reference to the tables forming the appendices. The bird's-eye view thus obtained can then be developed in the preceding account of methods, results and evaluation.

Points of particular interest in the findings are that no less than 42 per cent of the cases were estimated to need the help of a highly skilled case-worker; 33 per cent required help from a trained but less specialized worker; and 20 per cent required practical help which a competent receptionist could give. But individual patients tended to need help at different 'levels', and Miss Collins expresses doubt on whether water-tight compartments providing for need at different levels could be developed in any future service.

Miss Collins finds that the higher and middle social classes needed help

as much as the lower, to whom the social services are historically orientated. She confirms Miss Jane Peterson's Edinburgh experience that the young middle-aged women are more in need than either teenagers or geriatric patients. Before referral to her, half the patients had made no attempt to use the public services already available. After initial personal help with their problems, many were able to use these services, otherwise sterile to them; and many, after her help, had no need of them. Planners please note.

Miss Collins is confident that this type of service is needed outside hospitals. She has some doubts, however, about whether the general practitioner's surgery is the best site for a non-specialized M.S.W.; but feels that "the relationship between medical need and social factors is so delicate that it would be frankly dangerous to have the social worker operating quite apart from the doctor" (a sentiment that many echo).

Screening patients from pre-selected groups (e.g. new cases of malignant disease) might be expected to produce some blanks. But the fact that of patients so approached 100 out of 173 either refused help or did not need it, while the comparative figure for cases referred by the general practitioners was 14 out of 146, surely suggests that referral from the doctors is the way to find where the need lies. (Miss Collins demonstrates that some situations needing help were not picked up by the doctors; but experience and co-operation would probably improve the general practitioner's social diagnosis.)

It is a pity that the general practitioner's voice is not heard throughout the book. It would have been interesting to have their views on how much help they gained from Miss Collins' attachment in diagnosis and management. Did a third party entering the doctor-patient relationship present any difficulties? Were they relieved of any of their persistent surgery attenders?

It is easy to criticize the objectivity of the assessment of success—e.g. the value of a multiple-choice-answer circular to patients; but it is less easy to suggest alternatives. Some assessment of the value of the work done in terms of reduced disability, prophylaxis, economy of use of the Health and Welfare Services, and of general practitioners' time, would have been useful.

This is an important book for anyone interested in the future of general practice and the future of the Social Services. Those in practice will find it absorbing and challenging. Future general practitioners and their teachers should study its implications carefully.

Occupational Therapy in Rehabilitation. Second edition. Edited by E. M. MACDONALD, *M.B.E.* London. Baillière, Tindall & Cox. 1964. Pp. xvi+354. Price 37s. 6d.

Miss Macdonald stresses in her preface that occupational therapy is 'therapy' and is intended as an active form of treatment not merely "something to occupy the mind". Any reader who starts with the preconceived idea that occupational therapy consists of the indiscriminate prescription of basketry, and rug-making will rapidly be disillusioned. Following introductory chapters on the history of occupational therapy and on the general principles involved, there are special detailed sections