

the observer and his assistants. It is an exercise in experimental research but it shares with observational research certain principles which, if properly observed, make for accuracy, reliability and reproducibility in a study. Such principles are here set down clearly and understandably and their application to the clinical trials situation does not detract from the value of the book to the general practitioner.

In observational research the problems of definition of criteria, selection of cases, numbers required to give an answer, the need for controls are all to be met with and these subjects are fully discussed. Collected data requires analysis. Various alternatives are described and illustrated including semi-automated methods involving the use of edge-punched cards. Though the bulk of data handled in general practice studies may be greater than can be conveniently handled in this way, it remains the method of choice for some singlehanded studies.

The protocol ends with a chapter on the statistics of clinical trials including mathematical tests of the significance of results, and a section on common errors in clinical trials which can be extrapolated into the context of observational research by the reader without the least difficulty. Many practitioners who find the mathematics of research studies a matter of grief and sorrow will greet this small primer with joy. They will enjoy reading it, too, enlivened as it is with gentle humour in the right proportions, and just the right places.

Focus on medical computer development. A study of the Scottish scene by Scientific Control Systems Ltd. J. M. OCKENDEN and K. E. BODENHAM. London. Oxford University Press for the Nuffield Provincial Hospitals Trust, 1970. Pp. 121. 25s. 0d. (£1.25)

This excellent book sets out clearly the present position in medical computing and also gives a very penetrating comment on the present and future state of the Health Service. Although the study examines the application of computers in Health Services in Scotland, there are many references to England. A modest pattern of development in computing installations is recommended in their introduction.

In a further chapter the authors note how important it is to determine those areas where the application of computer techniques seem most likely to provide some immediate return. In the small section on general practice they state that because patient-doctor contacts account for 76 per cent of the total events, the patient-doctor contact is the foundation of the health service.

They recommend the following applications:

1. Analysis of consultations by patient and by diagnosis.

2. Analysis of prescribing habits.
3. Storage and retrieval of patient records.
4. Diagnostic aid.

They place the funding of studies in general practice squarely on the Government. They come down in favour of batch processing, and spell out that enthusiasm amongst eventual users is fundamental.

Short-term planning is discussed, and in touching on long-term planning, note the pending re-organization of the health service and its relation to computer development. Progress in the application of computers to medicine in Scotland is recognized.

This is a book that can be strongly recommended to any general practitioner who is interested in progress in medical care in the 1970s.

The menstrual cycle. KATHARINA DALTON, M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P. Harmondsworth. Penguin Books. 1970. Pp. 150. Price 5s. 0d. (25p).

It is difficult to recall that Dr Dalton's first paper (jointly with Dr Raymond Greene) was published as recently as 1953. The effect of endocrine balance in normal as well as abnormal menstruation on the outlook and behaviour of many women from menarche to menopause is now fully accepted.

Early in the 1900s Marie Stopes described the changes in this balance and the effect on women's sexual desire. This tended to reduce attention to the much more far-reaching results on women's moods and activity generally. Dr Dalton offers evidence of effects on the families ranging from the high incidence of toddler's ailments to disappointing examination results in the older children. She gives curves of breakages in the kitchen to errors in work whether solo or in teams among many variations during the paramenstruum.

The lay leadership of this short and clearly written book is likely to be wide and consequent approaches to family doctors numerically large. Critics may fasten upon the author's optimism as to results of treatment to smooth out the range of endocrine variation. Defence will be that sympathetic interest and observation in the diagnosis and treatment should result in diminished claims on the family doctor's time for the variety of symptoms that so often conceal the premenstrual syndrome. A record by every woman of her menstrual pattern can be an important asset and time saver in consultations.

Few women have earned so much gratitude from her contemporaries than the author who offers clear proof of the needs and the help available to a large proportion of women affected by their hormone balance.

General practitioners will be wise to read this short book.