

Book Reviews

The Future General Practitioner—Learning and Teaching. From a working party of the Royal College of General Practitioners. London: *British Medical Journal*. Price: £3.50.

The theme of the book is a quotation at the beginning of Chapter 4 of Sir Denis Hill's famous statement "The family physician's role is a difficult one, if it is to be sustained and developed, the general practitioner must become the most educated—the most comprehensively educated—of all the doctors in the Health Service."

Designed specifically for general-practitioner teachers, the concept of general practice is classified into five 'areas'. These are: area one, clinical practice—health and diseases; area two, clinical practice—human development; area three, clinical practice—human behaviour; area four, medicine and society; area five, the practice.

This classification is logical and effective and has been previously described in this *Journal* (1969).

However, it has to be immediately noted that only in area one is disease seriously considered, although variations of normal behaviour are well described in the sections on human development and behaviour. Nevertheless, the first and central question must be whether the balance between medicine and surgery and their branches, in relation to the psychosocial aspects of care is right. Some may well feel the psychosocial orientation is over-done, but ultimately this is a personal judgment and each reader will have to decide for himself.

On balance, at this stage of the development of general practice, the psychosocial preponderance seems justified, partly because these aspects of care have been under-emphasised in the past, partly because the physical diseases are taught in greater detail in the hospital sections of training, and partly because this orientation enables the authors to paint a picture of the breadth of general-practitioner care. This is, after all, one of the central features of this branch of medicine and it is here that the book is a resounding success.

Indeed, its recurrent emphasis on the unity of medicine and its delightful feature of quoting literature and the arts to underline its points is refreshing in this technological era. There is one particularly effective comparison between a mathematical formula and a quotation from John Donne.

Once the broad framework has been accepted, the various sections can be considered in detail. Here and there are some rather naive comments such as the statement "the best available parameters of health are the expectation of life and the infant mortality rate." Modern epidemiology can do better than this.

There appears to be a weakness running through the book on therapeutics. If the assumption is that therapeutics is the same in hospital and in general practice, then this is false. There are special problems in general practice, such as the problem of starting treatment which may have to be continued for years if not for life, and the particular difficulties in stopping drugs in the psychotropic field could perhaps have been considered in greater detail.

The all-male composition of the working party is perhaps reflected when the problems are considered of male doctors examining the genitals of female patients. At a time when an ever-increasing number of women are entering general practice, the reverse problem might well have been considered.

In Chapter Two, the word 'case' occurs with remarkable and unfortunate frequency. The old maxim that there are no cases in general practice still has much to commend it. Dogmatic teaching inevitably arouses comment and certainly in one place the book appears to state that full investigation must be put in train for every young girl with a urinary tract infection.

A certain ambivalence can be detected on periodic medical examinations. The authors write: "There has been no controlled trial in periodic medicals" and go on to say that such medicals "would prevent the doctor caring for his practice properly." Somehow the reader is left feeling that long examinations are better than short ones if only there was enough time. Considering the growing use of periodic medicals and developmental examinations in children and for insurance work, this section may be somewhat conservative.

On the other hand, many of the essential aspects of general practice are superbly covered. As might be expected from such a powerful team of experts on the doctor-patient relationship, the significance of communication between patient and doctor, particularly non-verbal communication, is well described.

One of the general practitioner's great difficulties is in deciding whether or not to intervene, and here the section on 'interventive medicine' is good. Similarly, the danger of attaching labels, particularly in the psychological field is neatly exemplified. It is encouraging to see contraception fully recognised as an important subject in the field of general practice (*see Editorial and supplement*).

The areas on human development and human behaviour are good and could well form a basis for discussion for doctors who never intend to enter general practice at all. These sections are complementary and help to provide a clinical setting for human behaviour seen by a doctor of first contact.

Similarly the section on medicine and society is most valuable. Although much has been published before, this section pulls together a number of threads in a useful way.

The final section on the practice may well for established general practitioners be the easiest. It contains the least original material because the subject of practice organisation has been covered in relatively more detail during the last few years. The main new theme developed here is the importance of audits.

The presentation of this book leaves something to be desired. The style is somewhat heavy; the presentation ponderous in places. Analysed is spelt with a 'z', many of the paragraphs contain 20 to 30 lines of text, and the book is printed in 9 point typeface. These are perhaps points that could be considered in the next edition—which seems inevitable.

This is a major work. It follows in direct line from earlier attempts to define the content of general practice but the pioneering work of Professor McWhinney could well have been more clearly acknowledged. It will be read all over the world and foreign editions may well appear. This is the book of the year for general practice and can be confidently recommended to every doctor who will in any way be concerned with general practice in the future.

(See *Editorial and advertisement*).

Gynaecology in General Practice (1972). Pp. 120. London: British Medical Association. Price: £1.00 (\$3.00).

This small book consists of a series of papers previously published in 1971 in the *British Medical Journal*. They are presented as 17 chapters, two of whom are written by general practitioners. The first of these, by Dr J. A. Henderson, describes gynaecological examination equipment in the surgery clearly and simply. He stresses his opinion that cervical erosions and contraception, including the fitting of intra-uterine devices, should normally be part of general practice. The final chapter on exfoliative cytology in general practice also emphasises groups at special risk and the role of the general practitioner both in arranging these smears and being responsible for their follow-up.

The remaining chapters are all written by specialists in their own fields and are particularly well chosen, being relevant to modern general practice. Most of the common day-to-day problems such as backache, pregnancy diagnosis, menopause, dysmenorrhoea have been covered.

Dr Ware, the editor of the *British Medical Journal*, is to be congratulated on his editing, as the headings are clear, and add to the clarity of presentation. A great deal has been compressed into 120 pages, and this book can be strongly recommended. Clinical gynaecology is looming ever larger in general practice and it is useful to have published an up-to-date and concise guide.

Lifeline Telephone Service for the Elderly—an account of a pilot project in Hull. Peter Gregory & Michael Young. A National Innovations Centre Booklet. Pp. 26. Price: 60p.

The Hull Corporation is unique in operating a telephone system outside the GPO monopoly. Its Welfare Department has for several years run a special scheme of reduced rental, with 300 free calls per year, for poor and housebound old people. Hull therefore selected itself for this pilot project to examine the effects of providing a free telephone service for 100 old people of restricted mobility, in most cases living alone.

The report is an interesting and entertaining document, answering eight key questions the investigators set themselves. The answers obtained were not always what one might expect. For instance, the telephone apparently did not result in more calls for doctors than before.

The authors are to be commended in writing a report from which the reader can emerge with a clear grasp of the findings, and respected for urging caution against treating their results as conclusive. Yet, they rightly feel able to make recommendations, and these are of value to all those concerned with The Chronically Sick & Disabled Persons Act of 1970 which makes the provision of a telephone service mandatory, and indeed a service of high priority. The Hull findings show that this provision is fully justifiable in a civilised State, and this report will be of interest to all general practitioners, district nurses, health visitors, and staff in welfare departments personnel.

The Shadowless Lamp: Memoirs of an R.A.M.C. Surgeon. Richard Hunt (1971). Pp. 134. London: William Kimber. Price: £2.50.

This, says the author, is not an autobiography but rather a series of anecdotes. Nevertheless it is difficult to write of our experiences in life without revealing something about ourselves. Brigadier Hunt is an exceptionally talented writer and able to express himself with great clarity. He stands out from the pages of this book as a man who has enjoyed his chosen profession and therefore succeeded in it. India, where he was born and spent his early years, is his first love and his reminiscences of life there in military cantonments before and during the first years of the Second World War have recalled to your reviewer recollections of the smells and sounds and dust of that strange yet lovable country. Brigadier Hunt's service life took him to most of the places to which an RAMC officer was sent. Being in the East he did not see much fighting, although he mentions the Burma campaign. There are odd and entertaining anecdotes in plenty, and more excitement seems to have fallen his lot than is usual in the life of a soldier-surgeon; or is it that things befall those with a mind prepared? Trained