

BOOK REVIEWS

Medical Education—A critical approach (1973).

SIMPSON, MICHAEL A. London: Butterworths. Price: £2.90.

When asked to review a book on medical education, one's heart does not inevitably dance with the daffodils. If one is fascinated by clinical medicine, by patients' problems, by the administrative techniques involved in the delivery of good primary medical care, medical educationism is quite often like Aunt Agatha—without reproach but without savour, full of virtue but rather dull.

But this little book has many virtues and is not at all dull. Indeed, it is so elegant and even exciting to read, that it risks losing the respectability that its good sense, its many references and its basic enthusiasm all deserve. Perhaps a few quotations from the book will most effectively show the calibre of the writing.

"... until recently some anatomy departments exacted a sort of droit de seigneur of 900 hours."

"It has been suggested that the practitioner today has been overtrained for the job he is doing and undertrained for the job he is supposed to do."

I enjoyed the advice on how to improve the resistance of senior men to change:

"Adopt the innovation with at least some show of pleasure and with many public exclamations of delight at the heady experience of moving bravely into the future. However, after careful study of the unwelcome new system, ensure that it has inadequate funds, equipment, space, time and personnel. Then, after a suitable interval, you will be able to give it up with well-publicised regret and return to your normal procedures.

This technique is a very successful means of resisting change, and could be compared with changing British drivers to the continental system of driving on the right-hand side of the road, but, for an initial trial period, applying this to buses only!"

New systems and departments of medical education "must be independent of old vested interests and well beyond the reach of the arrièregarde, lest they leap into them, as several have already done, with the awful idealism and selfless energy of protesting developers discovering a new slum."

"The naive writer of MCQ tests, for example, often provides so many unwitting clues to his intentions, as to bias the results. Miller quotes a doctor of education who, using the clues revealed by the wording of an examination in clinical pathology, scored 81 per cent. His secretary is recorded as having become equally adept at earning high scores."

This mixture of good writing, fascinating quotations, and a genuine message add up indeed to what John Butterfield in his preface calls "abrasiveness". But the book makes the point well that such abrasiveness is long overdue and that some of the scientific detachment and analysis

of our clinical attitude must, no matter how painful the process, be deployed on a good baleful look at our inefficient, ill-developed and outdated routines still surviving in so many medical schools.

This book is to be recommended to all those who struggle in the toils of an old curriculum or in the commando-like assaults essential to bringing in a revised one. Of course Simpson does not emphasise that many very good doctors come from our medical schools even if this is in spite of the teaching rather than because of it. It is a little iconoclastic and one-sided. But it has moved me, taught me a lot, and should be required reading for all Deans of Medical Schools and all heads of departments—and just to add to the unrest, to the students also!

It is so effective a document, emanating from such a lively mind, that I have one fear: that in less than three years the author will be thousands of miles away from Guy's, profitably and happily employed on the other side of the Atlantic.

E. WILKES

Iatrogenic diseases. (1972). First edition. D'ARCY, P. F. and GRIFFIN, J. P. Pp. viii+208. London: Oxford University Press. Price: boards edition: £5.00; paper covers: £3.50.

The pharmacological explosion of the last 50 years has stimulated a whole new department of enquiry, that of the adverse reactions and inter-reactions of drugs within the body and of doctor-induced, or iatrogenic diseases. It is no longer possible to prescribe even a relatively simple and familiar preparation without reference to the patient's general condition, his genetic history, his known sensitivities and most important, to the drugs he may already be taking.

The medical press in all parts of the world is full of reports of bizarre responses to therapy, and at times it almost seems as if the study of adverse effects of drugs has assumed more importance than the study of their worth—until it is remembered that it is no part of the doctor's function to make the ill patient worse, and that even the most unlikely after-effect of drug dosage may lead to discoveries which both protect and benefit.

Professor D'Arcy, of the Department of Pharmacology at Belfast, and Dr Griffin, of the Medicines Division of the Department of Health, have combined their experience and knowledge to produce a book which attempts to cover, within a reasonable compass, most that is known about disorders due to the administration of drugs, and their success is remarkable.

Prefacing the work with an amusing salvo against polypharmacy, they devote the first two chapters to a review of the epidemiological aspects of iatrogenic disease, and to drug interaction in general. The discrepancy between the relatively high incidence of drug-induced reactions found in