

random sampling, and their social and medical conditions were ascertained by home visits carried out by doctors. The questionnaire was detailed and the survey contains a wealth of information which builds up a detailed picture of the lives of the elderly in the Border Counties. Having some experience in filling in such questionnaires with elderly patients, however, I find it difficult to believe that the average interview time was only 30/40 minutes.

Neither of these volumes could be described as compulsive reading for general practitioners, but are more useful sources of information for those interested in the problems of the elderly.

R. V. H. JONES

**Bedside Diagnostic Examination** (1976).

DEGOWIN, E. L. & DEGOWIN, R. L. Pp. 952. London: Bailliere Tindall. Price: £8.50.

It seems that including the word "bedside" in the title of a book gives it a certain attraction, as if the information in the book passes into one's mind during sleep by a strange process of osmosis.

Degowin and Degowin (father and son co-authorship) set out "key" symptoms and signs under the broader and traditional headings such as head and neck, thorax, abdomen. The key symptom is defined, the clinical situations in which it may be manifest are listed, and the key signs are described. There is therefore a naivety implicit in the book that clinical medicine is a matching of the symptoms and signs from your patient with the stereotypes in the book, a diagnosis then becoming apparent.

The sections of the book which deal with the examination of the patient starts with the anatomical considerations to be brought to mind when an examination is performed. However, the authors' style is unattractive. Such phrases as "Compare symmetric parts of the chest sequentially with the same hand", though they may be precise, may require a second reading before the meaning becomes apparent.

As well as sections on anatomy, examination, key symptoms, and signs, the authors cannot resist the temptation to stray into specific clinical syndromes and their possible aetiology. This creates some overlap with larger medical text books and at the same time blurs the boundaries of their own book. The final chapter is set out as a medical dictionary and the information in it is necessarily brief and somewhat redundant in a book of this nature.

As a dictionary, or book of reference, this may possibly appeal to some; others may feel is an inappropriate format with an indigestible content.

M. J. Y. FISHER

**Taking the Rough with the Smooth: Dietary Fibre and your Health** (1976). STANWAY, A. Pp. 250. London: Souvenir Press. Price: £3.50.

Unlike urbanised Western man, this book suffers from an apparently short creative transit time and excessive bulk in relation to nutrients. Dietary fibre hypotheses are clearly important, but the evidence is still not only conflicting and complex, but scanty and based on observations on very few people. The largest single group of free-living Western people whose individual large-bowel transit times are accurately known happens to be in a South Wales mining village; they were found to be intermediate between the transit times of urban and rural Africans, although the staple diet is chips, pop, and beer! Vast hypotheses are being erected on fragments of evidence derived from tiny populations, often not randomly sampled.

The useful things that may be reliably said to our patients on the subject can be conveyed in about three paragraphs. The claim on the dust-wrapper that "Taking the rough with the smooth may prove a landmark in twentieth-century thinking about our health" is hardly justified.

The book will not help doctors looking for a serious but simple discussion of evidence and current research trends. Although a long list of references is given, they are not linked to the statements in the text, and so cannot be verified. It cannot be recommended for a practice patients' library either: really good books for patients demand more time and care than those for doctors, not less.

JULIAN TUDOR HART

**Social Policy and Public Expenditure 1975—Inflation and Priorities** (1976). Pp. 193. ED. KLEIN, R. London: Centre for Studies in Social Policy. Price: £3.50.

The Centre for Studies and Social Policy is independent and non-partisan and its Council of Management includes Professor Ralf Dahrendorf, Professor J. N. Morris, Lord Seebohm, and Mr David Steel. The Centre was incorporated late in 1972, through the Joseph Rowntree Memorial Trustees, and seeks to look at social issues across departmental boundaries and academic disciplines, and to identify the social implications of issues which are often regarded as outside the scope of social policy analysis.

This issue is well worth reading, if only for its introduction, "Priorities in the age of inflation", and chapter four on the National Health Service. Both these are written by Rudolf Klein and I learnt a good deal from them.

He emphasises that Britain's level of spending on "social protection" per head of population is less than half that of Germany, Holland, and Denmark and a third lower than that of France. He goes on to underline the need for a complete reappraisal of policy in all the social services in