

## **BOOK REVIEWS**

**Need Your Doctor be so Useless?** (1973). MALLESON, A. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd. Price: £2.85.

What a title! What a book! Dr Malleeson is a British psychiatrist working in Canada, who has had some experience of general practice in London. He writes with a most entertaining and easily readable style and scores a series of pungent and penetrating points against the medical profession in general, and psychiatry in general practice in particular. Inevitably he overstates his case referring to the "economic cancer of health care" and concluding "the doctor/patient relationship, as with any other helper—helped interaction, often turns out to be about the most unhelpful of all kinds of human relationships." But nevertheless many of his points are well argued, well presented, and convincing. In particular he stresses the lack of scientific justification for many of the medicines prescribed, their dangers and side-effects, and the great danger of medical care, especially mental hospitals, inducing dependence.

The publishers claim that this book is "scrupulously documented", but nevertheless although about 500 references are quoted, only about half a dozen come from general practice and several of those are many years old. Dr Malleeson does not seem aware of the resurgence of morale in British general practice, and calls almost wistfully, in an interesting final chapter, for research and academic links. He makes no reference to the Royal College of General Practitioners or any of the university departments of general practice.

In the section on medical politics he writes, "The brighter young doctors all become specialists" and . . . "in Britain everybody still has a general practitioner, but many of these general practitioners now send any patients with a problem straight to hospital outpatient departments to be looked after by specialists."

Nevertheless, despite the provocation and some out-of-date facts, it is impossible to read this book without being greatly amused and intellectually stimulated. In many ways his ideas preceded those of Illich and I would rate this as one of the dozen most challenging books for vocational trainees.

D. J. PEREIRA GRAY

**Doctors and the Law** (1976). TAYLOR, NOEL LEIGH. Pp. 154. London: Oyez Publishing Limited. Price: £2.50.

Medical students will probably find this a useful and informative book. However, I feel that most practising doctors will have a basic knowledge of most of its contents. Any doctor who needs legal advice on a specific question will probably have to resort to a more authoritative source in any case.

Nevertheless, it does cover most aspects of medical practice. Mr Taylor starts by explaining the role of the General Medical Council and its disciplinary procedures and goes on to cover the organisation of the National Health Service, and the difference between being an employed hospital doctor and a self-employed general practitioner. He finally discusses the role of the prison medical service.

The chapter on hospitals airs the problems that might arise if a patient were to read doctors' referral letters and outlines the laws of libel pertaining to this problem. The rights of hospital authorities faced with a difficult patient are also mentioned.

Procedures for making complaints about aspects of medical care are described and would no doubt be helpful for patients or their relatives who have a genuine grievance.

The topics of confidentiality and the doctor's position in a court of law and negligence are well covered, but after reading the section on the control of dangerous drugs, I found that I was left confused.

The awkward dilemma that a doctor might have to face if he were to treat someone whom he either suspected, or knew, to be involved in a serious crime, is well covered.

Some doctors are asked by solicitors to witness the last will of an infirm patient, and Mr Taylor explains just what he might be letting himself in for if the will is contested.

Although this book was published in March 1976, it is already out of date on the right of doctors charging fees for contraceptive prescribing—which shows how difficult it is to keep right up to date in any field.

D. A. LANDER