

most, if not all, diseases start as a single event affecting a single cell.

BRENNIG JAMES

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### COLLEGE ARMS

Sir,  
I am curious to know the true identity of the owl perched supreme on the College

coat of arms. Would it be possible for an ornithologically minded Fellow or Member to provide the information with authority?

From the various sightings that I have recorded on journals, ties and paper-headings it would appear to be the long-eared owl (*Asio otus*). Assuming that it is a resident of the British Isles the little owl (*Athene noctua*) would be more appropriate being associated with the Goddess of Wisdom from whom it derives its name; but alas this owl does not possess tufts!

Should it really be the little owl, the

security of tenure of the snake on the gavel would be in some doubt, as this owl is known to eat reptiles in its varied diet and, according to Aristotle, snakes have been attacked by this raptor. Certainly the balance of nature would be more effective if it were the long-eared owl, but why should this species be so favoured as to sit on such a pinnacle?

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## BOOK REVIEWS

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### THE GENERAL PRACTITIONER AND THE PRIMARY HEALTH CARE TEAM

N. D. Mackichan

Pitman Medical  
Tunbridge Wells (1976)  
374 pages. Price £6

Dr Mackichan sets out with the intention of providing a 'handbook for those employed in, attached to, and working with a family practice', a tall order, but one which is outstandingly realized in this book. It provides a wealth of information simply presented and refreshingly free from the jargon and many clichés which usually bedevil general practice literature.

The increased volume of work in general practice since the inception of the NHS and the tendency of doctors to work less in isolation than hitherto require greater efficiency in practice organization and greater co-operation with supporting services—some of them outside the normal practice ambit. All this gives rise to the concept of the primary health care team, and after relating the disciplines to one another and explaining the administration of the general practitioner service, the author goes on to develop his theme with individual chapters devoted to the various ancillary specialists: nurses, midwives, health visitors, social workers, dispensers, and so on. These chapters are valuable in themselves, although at times necessarily superficial, because of

the degree of specialization and qualification required.

The core of the book, however, is the centre section of some 150 pages on practice documentation and administration, intended for the budding receptionist/secretary/practice manager. There are many useful diagrams and tables, and practically all the essential NHS forms are reproduced, from the FP1 to the FP1001, although it is unfortunate that the old form Med 3 is shown, rather than the new one introduced on 4 October 1976, specimens of which must have been available before the book went to press. There is also little explanation of the RM7 procedure.

The advice to receptionists on how to cope with various clinical and emergency situations is particularly good, though surely certification alone can never be an indication for a home visit. Some of the other sections are a little disproportionate: for example, the sterilization of glass syringes (does any general practitioner really use paraldehyde these days?), chemical tests on the urine (the Ames preparations are far more accurate in my hands), and taking an ECG—only half a page is given to this important subject.

Minor criticisms apart, the author has given us a book which will become something of a handbook for all members of the primary care team, not least the trainee general practitioner. A must for all postgraduate and health centre libraries.

P. J. HOYTE

### PRINCIPLES OF FAMILY PSYCHIATRY

John G. Howells

Pitman Medical  
Tunbridge Wells (1976)  
338 pages. Price £7

I have never been to Ipswich but I am sure that the Institute of Family Psychiatry there must be painted black and white. In this book the director spells out the principles which guide his work with a certainty and righteousness that are most unfashionable.

Dr Howells describes the discipline of family psychiatry, considers the anatomy of the family, discusses nosology, explains family psychopathology and family diagnosis, and outlines the various forms of therapy he uses. His writing is a strange mixture of clarity and idiosyncratic jargon; his style juxtaposes unbearable convolutions with short sentences.

He classifies and reclassifies compulsively. Psychiatric diagnostic terms are renamed because they are unsatisfactory: neuroses become psychonoses, psychoses become encephaloses, and schizophrenia is rechristened encephalo-ataxia. The logic behind this activity is not without point, but the changes do not appear to lead anywhere.

Any family has five dimensions: individuals, internal communications, general psychic properties, external communications, and physical properties; and each may be studied in the

past, the present, and the future. In this way chaos is soon reduced to order. At interview, which may be with the whole family or any section of it, he recognizes indicators of disturbance in each of the 15 dimensions. He may offer insight to his patients, but this is only the prelude to therapy, which combines benexperiental psychotherapy and vector therapy. The former term is not very clearly explained, but the latter is an old friend to Dr Howell's readers. It involves finding out what forces are harmful and applying opposing forces to counteract them. A grandmother who is upsetting the household would be sent out to work and a mother in damaging contact with her child would be replaced by a good nanny. It all seems so simple that it is hard to see why one had not thought of it before.

General practitioners are mentioned once, as a source of referral. Like everything else untidy, they then disappear. It comes as a shock 13 pages from the end of the book to learn that divorce occurs sometimes, though it is not explained how or why the therapy can fail. The ultimate answer is that we must develop the salutiferous society, which will produce nothing but healthy and happy people.

What can a general practitioner cull from this strange book? He can be helped to think about families constructively; some of the analyses offered are certainly useful. The dogma that 'the family' not only can be but always is the real patient in emotional disturbance, is unlikely to be accepted. Therapy affects the way that individuals treat each other, but 'the family' is an abstract concept and really cannot take any kind of medicine. Dr Howells elevates what is no more than a set of techniques into a philosophy, a discipline and even a credo, with a good chance of alienating those who could benefit by his thinking.

Here is a book to borrow rather than to buy. Read it with an earnest determination so not to miss that which is good.

C. M. HARRIS

### **OBSTETRICS, CONTRACEPTION AND GYNAECOLOGY**

David Brown

*Pitman Medical  
Tunbridge Wells (1976)*

208 pages. Price £5

David Brown's postgraduate teaching at Chelmsford and his book *Obstetrics for the Family Doctor* are both well known

and appreciated. That book was first published in 1966 with a second edition in 1971. This is a third revision of the original with additional sections on contraception and gynaecology, and it is aimed at nurses and midwives as well as family doctors.

The obstetric section retains its old style, giving a sound method of dealing with whatever problem presents without going into textbook detail. The original first chapter on harmony between general-practitioner obstetricians and consultants has gone, let us hope not because the author thinks it no longer worthwhile to make his liberal views known. The text has been brought up to date especially in regard to small-for-dates babies, epidural anaesthesia, fetal monitoring, prostaglandins, fetoplacental function tests, and substitution of diasonography (ultrasound) for x-rays. The two illustrations from the second edition are not included, and graphs of Chelmsford's perinatal mortality for 1960 to 1970, with encouraging general practitioner unit figures, are succeeded by diasonographic scans. The scan of placenta previa excites admiration for the interpreter's ability to visualize even the head, let alone the placenta. 'Uncannily accurate' is the author's verdict.

Compression of contraception and gynaecology into seven and 48 pages respectively requires a dogmatic style and far from complete coverage. Many a vulvar wart has been demolished without recourse to the only treatment suggested—diathermy. Yet there is a great deal of useful information, not all of it well known; for instance, the relative potency of progestogens used for oral contraception, but potency in regard to what? Menstrual loss, weight gain, premenstrual tension, or perhaps only libido in guinea pigs? Inevitably the finer points are missing.

The available space on this book's pages is no more than on those of the second edition. The extra material has been accommodated by filling more of the page with print, by wasting no space between sections, and by using type no larger than that used for this review. In fact it is not too difficult to read, but it looks formidable and would have been easier and more attractive in larger type, at a cost of only a quarter of an inch increase in thickness.

This is a useful book for general practitioners, particularly those content to know only one way of dealing with a problem. The author hopes that it will help the diploma candidate, and so it will, but he must beware of the examiner who will not accept dogma; the student is advised to read a textbook as well.

M. I. COOKSON

### **PRACTICAL MANAGEMENT OF THE ELDERLY (3rd EDITION)**

Sir Fergus Anderson

*Blackwell Scientific  
Publications, Oxford (1976)*

452 pages. Price £8.50

In view of the increasing proportion of elderly people in the population, it is encouraging that a third edition of this book should have been found necessary. The central portion, amounting to three-quarters of the text, consists of descriptions of clinical disorders and diseases, with particular reference to their occurrence and treatment in the elderly. There are, for example, chapters on heart disease, endocrine diseases, and disease of the genito-urinary system. The last chapter is called 'Organization of a Geriatric Service', while the first six chapters set the scene with discussion on normal and abnormal ageing, the problems of the elderly, and services available for old people in the community.

Reviews of previous editions have generally suggested that this book would be widely appreciated by general practitioners, specialists, community physicians, medical students, and student nurses. The author himself suggests that the purpose behind the book is to 'stimulate the interest of the physician', but the selection of such a broad target has resulted in unevenness in the text. The technical level of information needed by a student nurse is of a different order to that required by a specialist physician. For example, following a chatty description of chronic bronchitis, there is detailed discussion of the complex hospital investigations appropriate before a particular surgical operation for bronchial carcinoma, while under the results of screening the elderly it is reported that in the elderly 'corns and bunions are also of frequent occurrence and will be found on routine examination of older people', which as far as general practitioners are concerned is hardly the sort of news you would rush from Ghent to Aix.

Despite this criticism, the clinical material comprising the bulk of the text will be valuable to general practitioners as a useful reference for up-to-date treatment and management. The chapter on strokes and common neurological disorders is particularly illuminating. The chapters at the beginning and end of the book are, however, more dogmatic and in general reflect the viewpoint of a geriatrician.

R. V. H. JONES