

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