

is the welcome new contributor for general practice. He uses the now widely accepted job definition of the general practitioner as a framework which I found resulted in a sketchy and rather disappointing review. I hope that in future he will cover fewer aspects in greater depth. There is much to be said now for general practice having its own annual.

Two useful reviews of beta-blockers help towards more rational prescribing; and the myocardial risks of the contraceptive pill and tricyclic antidepressants are clearly pointed out. Fegan's injection technique for varicose veins turns out to be rather more disappointing in the long-term than was thought five years ago, but the safety and heartvalve replacement have never been better, with only a five per cent mortality. Umbilical hernia in infants should no longer be considered entirely benign; the five per cent incidence of major complications and safer paediatric anaesthesia demand the same attention as inguinal hernia at the same age.

Placebo 'hypnotics' are disappointingly ineffective, but the humble aspirin is gaining ground as a useful prophylactic for those who have had transient ischaemic attacks.

The "Books of the Year" section at the end of the annual should have a separate section for general practice, at present considered by the editors as part of general medicine. These gentlemen are also a trifle confused about geriatrics, under which heading they include principles of genetic counselling. Better late than never, I suppose.

T. F. PAINE

COMMON SYMPTOMS OF DISEASE IN THE ELDERLY

H. M. Hodkinson

Blackwell
Oxford (1976)

147 pages. Price £4

One of the most difficult but stimulating challenges in the care of the elderly is the establishment of a diagnosis. The student is indoctrinated by his medical school to arrive at a single diagnosis. This is often impossible in the elderly because of the multifactorial nature of illness. The problem is further accentuated by the altered signalling of common diseases and the effects of the ageing process on the pattern of disease. The elderly, because of apathy and a willingness to accept disability as a normal concomitant of growing old, tend to delay presentation of their illness until it has reached an advanced

state. Failing mental function may cause obfuscation of symptoms. It is not surprising that the inexperienced practitioner may find the problems daunting and experience the uncomfortable insecurity of insufficient knowledge.

Dr Hodkinson in *Common Symptoms* has tackled the task of making a diagnosis in a thoroughly practical way. He has concentrated on conditions which are potentially treatable. This functional approach will appeal to the general practitioner who is concerned with the preservation of the independence and quality of life of his patient rather than compiling a catalogue of disease from which he is suffering. In addition to describing well defined symptoms from the various systems of the body, the author has not neglected the vague symptoms, interpretation of which so often causes difficulty. The chapters on how disease differs in old age and non-specific presentations of illness and its routine investigation are particularly valuable. The final chapter comprehensively covers perhaps the greatest single danger to the elderly patient—the administration of drugs. Indeed every chapter in the book contains references to drug-induced symptoms.

The style and language of the author makes this a book which can be read with ease either as part of general reading or for help with a specific problem. The vocational trainee and established practitioner alike will find much information which will be of practical value. The course organizer will have an abundant source of material for post-graduate meetings and discussion groups. Undoubtedly the book will fulfil the educational needs of a wide range of readers and achieve the success of its predecessors in the series.

AUSTEN ELLIOTT

DRUG TREATMENT

Ed. Graeme S. Avery

Churchill Livingstone
Edinburgh (1976)

1048 pages. Price £16

It is refreshing to find a clinical pharmacology textbook written with a view to combining a thorough scientific basis of pharmacology with a practical approach to drug prescribing and disease management.

The initial chapters discuss in detail pharmacokinetic principles and then show clearly how a basic knowledge of these processes enables one's day-to-day

prescribing habits to be modified in a logical manner.

Following chapters detail theoretical and practical considerations in prescribing for the neonate, child, pregnant woman, and geriatric. In many cases, for example the chapter dealing with the neonate, the detail must obviously be of most interest to the specialist. However, a clear synopsis of important principles is included at the front of each chapter, which is of tremendous value to the generalist who feels the need of basic understanding.

Further chapters discuss adverse drug reactions and pharmaceutical considerations relevant to drug action. Again these chapters are detailed but clearly written, and knowledge of these basic principles must be recognized as necessary, especially when one is exposed to drug company advertising.

The remaining chapters deal with the clinical pharmacology of diseases classified according to particular systems, for example the cardiovascular and nervous system. There are also chapters devoted to the therapeutics of such varied topics as ENT, ophthalmology, and even obstetrics and gynaecology. Again, the pleasing combination of general considerations is followed by detailed disease-by-disease, practical but logical prescribing advice.

There are little or no diagnostic guidelines and accordingly therapeutics are discussed in terms of established concrete diagnosis. This may be considered a disadvantage from the general practitioner's point of view, where the doctor finds himself often dealing with a symptom complex rather than a certain diagnosis.

Another disadvantage is that when referring to a specific disease often no distinction is made between treatment safely carried out in the general practitioner's surgery and that requiring hospital supervision. However, a few minutes' reading will clarify this.

This is a valuable and interesting book for all doctors. It is comprehensive, well written, and has an excellent index which make its thousand-page length less clumsy than it first appears. Its great advantage, therefore, is that it makes available logical advice on management about almost any situation a doctor may meet.

A. P. KRATKY

CORRECTION

In the book reviews section of the February issue of the *Journal*, the address of Kluwer-Harrap Handbooks (*Practice—a Handbook of Primary Medical Care*) is given as Isleworth but should be Brentford, Middx.