

in practice 30 years ago. Such anecdotal material from Dr Gray contrasts strangely with his own insistence on page 14 that a stimulating atmosphere is ensured by the custom of challenging all statements with the question 'what evidence?' which promotes critical thinking.

Generalizing from very small samples is almost a national pastime, but it can be dangerous. On page 18 Dr Gray makes much of the comments of junior medical staff in the hospital (he does not say how many) of "a well-known British medical school". These young doctors are said to have had little time alone with their consultant and in the next sentence this is unfavourably compared with the trainee-trainer situation. I hope he is right but I would be happier with real evidence. Not all trainees have been wholly satisfied with their experience.

Finally, on page 21 we are told that a bank of multiple choice questions is being constructed to cover the syllabus, and an example is given in which the learner is asked to say whether the projected increase in the over-75 population by 1985 is: five per cent, ten per cent, 20 per cent, 25 per cent, or 30 per cent. As MCQ Co-ordinator for the MRCGP examination I have spent much time over several years constructing, recruiting, scrutinizing, testing (through a small panel of experienced general-practitioner examiners), and evaluating multiple choice questions by advanced computer analysis techniques; I feel justified therefore in challenging the validity and relevance of this Exeter question which I hope is atypical (of course if atypical it should hardly have been cited).

I have other criticisms of Dr Gray's paper but let me end by saying how stimulating I found both those parts I endorse and those I do not. I see the efforts of Dr Gray and his colleagues to develop a progressive training scheme as both admirable and impressive. Thus I would hypothesize that their declared belief in the value of criticism will ensure (all italics in this paper are mine) an educated and spirited response to my letter, while preserving what I can assure them from my side is a real

personal regard. It is through such criticism that we can all hope to improve vocational training.

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INFANTILE COLIC

Sir,
In recent months we have had many complaints of severe infantile colic not related to organic disease.

In a sample of 75 babies born between 1 January 1977 and January 1978 and still living within our practice area, 48 have been brought to a doctor for medical advice. Routine advice about feeding problems given by our health visitors and at the welfare baby clinic has not been included in this total though many of the mothers and babies have had extensive support. Thirty-three babies (25 bottle fed, five mixed breast and bottle, three purely breast fed) had symptoms sufficiently severe and/or prolonged to warrant a prescription of, most commonly, dicyclomine hydrochloride.

Is this problem widespread with the new infant formulae milks or have we been particularly unfortunate? Some of the babies required many weeks of treatment. Most, but not all of the mothers obtain their milk supplies through the local clinics at reduced prices, so most babies have been given the same commercial brand.

In the original sample of 75, I excluded only two babies from random selection. One child had been in hospital for gastrointestinal disease and one family did not speak English and did not adhere to European methods of infant feeding.

M. L. BOWEN

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RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF GENERAL PRACTITIONERS

Sir,
The College has a declared commitment and an organization to initiate, finance, and co-ordinate research in general practice. However, at present, the limited amount of time that practising doctors are able to devote to research is an inevitable restriction on any research project.

With the increase in vocational training schemes there is now a large number of doctors who are familiar with general practice. Not all of these doctors feel ready to join a partnership immediately and many would welcome the opportunity to study various aspects of general practice in greater depth.

May we suggest that the College considers offering a number of research fellowships to its new members? If there was financial support for a year's fellowship with the option to submit an MD thesis, we feel sure that there would be many applicants. To have a number of such full-time researchers would help to consolidate the body of research that general practice needs so much.

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BOOK REVIEWS

MEMOIRS OF A SURGEON

Hedley Atkins

Springwood Books, London (1977)
259 pages. Price £3.95

This is a well written and extremely readable book which tells us a great deal about one of the outstanding surgical personalities of our days—Professor Sir Hedley Atkins, KBE, DM, M.CH, FRCS, FRCP.

In it the author discusses, in a humble and witty manner, his family background and early home life, his student days, and his early struggles. He recalls his 40-year association with Guy's Hospital, his 24 years with the Royal

College of Surgeons, and the years he spent with other important bodies including the General Medical Council and the Medical Research Council. There are chapters on his army life during the Second World War, his literary interests, and his library. He plays down his ultimate, immense personal success which culminated in his being elected President of the Royal College of Surgeons and, a year later, President of the Royal Society of Medicine. He was appointed KBE in 1967 and over the years has been given many honorary degrees and fellowships.

His love for both of his parents, for his wife, Judy, and for his two boys, is made quite clear. His father was also a remarkable man. He obtained his FRCS diploma at Guy's but decided to enter general practice and in a few years became personal medical adviser to Sir John French (Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force—"The First Hundred Thousand") with whom he went to France. A short while later he became Physician-in-Ordinary to the Duke of Connaught. By then he had been appointed KCMG and KCVO. Thus Hedley was brought up in a house from which a successful general practice was being run, which had on its list many distinguished patients and visitors.

He tells us a little about all of these things, about Rugby School in his day, how much he enjoyed himself at Trinity College, Oxford, obtaining first class honours in physiology, and about the close friendships he made with C. M. Hinshelwood and many others.

A scholarship to Guy's led to similar successes there, with appointment to the surgical staff and the formation of the Breast Unit which he started by himself in a small way. It has since been attended by about 20,000 patients!

There is a splendid chapter on what he believes should be the attributes and philosophy of a good surgeon, and on how the techniques of surgery and the atmosphere in operation theatres have changed during the past 40 years.

The chapters on his travels and recreations make excellent reading, especially his rugby football experiences, starting with the famous "Kittermaster's Try" (which he saw at Twickenham with his father), followed by his own games for the Oxford Greyhounds (equivalent to the University 2nd XV), the Harlequins, and for Middlesex. For those interested in sailing, his many adventures along the east and south coasts of England with his wife and children are excitingly recalled.

His passing comments on the NHS, on distinction awards, private practice, and politics (he has voted for all three major political parties in his time!), as

well as on recreation, retirement, and experiments on animals, are all interesting and full of wisdom.

This excellent and amusing autobiography should be read not only by every medical student and house officer who aspires to be a surgeon, but also by physicians, general practitioners, and others who work closely with their surgical colleagues. I am sure that they will all enjoy it and benefit from it.

LORD HUNT OF FAWLEY

THE MEDICAL ANNUAL 1977/78: THE YEAR-BOOK OF TREATMENT

*Sir Ronald Bodley Scott and
Sir James Fraser (Eds.)*

*John Wright and Sons
Bristol (1977)*

381 pages. Price £11

The continuing education of general practitioners is more a personal problem than the responsibility of any outside agency. It is best achieved by taking advantage of every learning opportunity, whether by attendance at courses or lectures, or by taking advice from specialists, or by reading.

Reading, although a pleasure to some and a chore to many, is a necessary part of professional life and for the last 95 years the *Medical Annual* has provided a valuable opportunity for education.

This year there are special articles on joint infections and on riot control agents. The former is of particular value to general practitioners and the latter is of topical and practical interest to those working in areas of potential disquiet.

The editors have done their work well and maintained the high standard we have come to expect. General practitioners will find much to interest them, especially the chapters "The Diagnosis of the Acute Abdomen", by Sir James Fraser, "Coronary Disease", by Peter Carson and David Oakley, "Idiopathic Facial (Bell's) Palsy", by John Groves, "Cryptorchidism", by Dr Burke, and "The Current State of Hypertension", by Dr Havard. Professor J. D. E. Knox contributes an interesting chapter on general practice. To refer to these does not detract from the remainder, all of which can be read with advantage. Even ascorbic acid for the common cold finds a mention; there may be something in it after all!

To some the price of this book may be detrimental. Few journals can be obtained for a smaller annual outlay and here we have a distillate of all the leading journals. Year by year it becomes an encyclopaedia as well as a review.

H. W. K. ACHESON

DIRECTORY OF POSTGRADUATE MEDICAL CENTRES

*Council for Postgraduate Medical
Education in England and Wales*

London (1978)

76 pages. Price £2

The latest booklet listing details of all the postgraduate medical centres in the UK was produced with commendable promptness in January. This is the fourth directory of its kind and the best so far. More trouble seems to have been taken in collecting names, the layout is clearer, and it will continue to be a most useful reference booklet, precisely meeting its purpose. Apart from the curious custom of listing in several regions the consultants with their qualifications in full and the general practitioners without, there are few complaints, and the Council can be congratulated on a most useful publication.

D. J. PEREIRA GRAY

ABORTION

*Malcolm Potts, Peter Diggory
and John Peel*

*Cambridge University Press
Cambridge and London (1977)*

*575 pages. Price £17.95 (hardback)
£5.95 (paperback)*

According to my dictionary propaganda arose in 1622 when a congregation of the Roman Catholic Church were charged with the spreading of Catholicism. (It is ironic that the techniques developed for this purpose have been used so often since then with force and sincerity against the doctrines of that Church.) The facts, the arguments, and the tone deployed by the authors of *Abortion* are unquestionably propaganda; they see dangers to individuals (both born and unborn) and to society as a whole, and have collected massive evidence to counter these dangers. They have taken both a global view travelling in person between Afghanistan and Yugoslavia, and a conceptual view covering abnormalities of fetal development to the demographic consequences of liberal abortion laws. They have indexed items from Algeria to Zambia and massively buttressed their argument by references: one chapter has a mere 21 references, but another, "The Epidemiology of Induced Abortion," no less than 194. All this effort is devoted to, as the blurb says, "documenting changes, discussing logistics of abortion services and their role in family planning . . . making predictions." It sees abortion as "a key factor in the history of the past