

TREATMENT OF WHOOPING COUGH

Sir,
In the 1950s in a village practice in East Anglia I had to deal with a full-scale epidemic of whooping cough in the pre-vaccine era. I was forewarned since an epidemic in the nearest town preceded its introduction to my own community.

At that time deaths from blood dyscrasia in children had been reported, which had been treated repetitively with chloramphenicol. Paediatricians voiced their great alarm at its use in children, generating a fear which, I believe, still exists. I decided, however, not to go to the extreme of withholding this drug from cases of whooping cough, as it was reported to be the only available effective treatment. Therefore, as soon as the symptoms placed the diagnosis beyond doubt, each child was given a single five-day course of chloramphenicol graduated according to age. The effect of this was dramatic and gratifying to all concerned. Food loss from vomiting rapidly ceased, and sleep loss (by both mother and child) from coughing spasms was greatly reduced. Every child remained ambulant and it was my impression that the total duration of the illness was less than in previous epidemics. No toxic side

effects were observed.

It saddens me to hear in 1978 of deaths in children resulting from this most distressing of diseases. Were I in practice today I would have no hesitation in reverting to this simple therapeutic procedure in preference to a resumption of mass vaccination.

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AREA MEDICAL OFFICERS

Sir,
I note that Dr Vaughan adds two more to the number of college members who are area medical officers (*July Journal*, p. 441). In Scotland we do not have area medical officers, but the chief administrative medical officers of our Health Boards carry broadly similar responsibilities, as well as many of those which in England and Wales are carried by the regional medical officer.

Dr J. C. G. Mercer, FRCGP, who retires from the post of Chief Administrative Medical Officer of Fife Health Board shortly, is a foundation member of the College.

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KING'S FUND PROJECT

Sir,
Your readers may be interested to know that a simple, low-cost method of keeping track of elderly patients has been developed and is in use in Devon.

The method uses record cards which are inserted into patients' medical wallets. Most elderly patients are assessed once a year during routine consultations and their completed cards are filed separately. Unseen patients are easily identified at the end of the year because the cards are prominent in their wallets. This group, averaging 20 to 30 patients aged over 75, is followed up.

I will be glad to give readers who are interested further details if they write to me at the address given below.

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BOOK REVIEWS

COUNSELLING PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH HANDICAPS

Owen Nettles

*Tappenden Print
Crawley (1978)*

56 pages. Price £1.50

'Counselling' is one of those activities that we now discover we have all done for years without realizing it! Once recognized and labelled, such activities can be analysed, experts can advise on them, and entire new jargons can coalesce around them.

All praise, then, to Owen Nettles, a paediatric chartered physiotherapist, and the author of this first-rate little book. She has succeeded in putting down in clear, simple English a great deal of commonsense and advice. By keeping to non-technical language, the book offers as much guidance as many others which are written at greater

length and in flabby jargon.

Health visitors, nurses, trainees, as well as established general practitioners, would do well to read this booklet. The author discusses perceptively such topics as the reaction of siblings to the birth of a handicapped child, stressing that the usual jealousy is heightened by the extra attention this baby needs. She also reminds us that the parents will inevitably pass through a period of mourning after the birth—mourning for the normal healthy child they had expected. On a more practical note, she stresses prevention of obesity. Parents often give sweets and food as a substitute to the child who is not allowed to go out to play, and well-meaning friends may offer chocolates and biscuits as gifts, not knowing what else to give.

Separate chapters are devoted to education, leisure, and help available for the handicapped child, but the section on "Looking Ahead" to the child's future gives only five lines to sexual problems, though this may be

considered an unfair complaint about a book on children. My only other criticism is the absence of an index or suggestions for further reading.

This book highlights a neglected topic and would therefore be a most welcome addition to any practice library. One wonders how many more neglected subjects will be unearthed in the years to come!

DAVID HASLAM

THE NEW SEX THERAPY

Helen Singer Kaplan

*Penguin Books
Harmondsworth (1978)*

589 pages. Price £3.95

Many of today's general practitioners arrived in practice without having had any formal training in sexual counselling. The importance of this subject

soon becomes apparent in general practice and skills have to be learnt to meet a continuing need expressed by patients.

Although Masters and Johnson's classic book is always quoted as the standard source, and although it represented historically a considerable advance in this subject, it is not, in fact, easy to read.

In my opinion Dr Helen Kaplan has written the two most useful books for general practitioners, partly because she writes simply and clearly and partly because the emphasis in her books is on those conditions most commonly seen in general practice.

The New Sex Therapy was first published in the USA in 1974 and it reached Great Britain in 1975. The advantage of this Penguin edition is its price; at £3.95 it is within reach of all general practitioners and vocational trainees.

Sexual counselling does not require elaborate equipment or a tremendously complicated training but it does require considerable knowledge of the range of normal, conditions of privacy and trust, and counsellors who are comfortable in dealing with two clients at once; it is an essential part of modern general practice. Among the books on the subject that I have found useful, this one is the best.

D. J. PEREIRA GRAY

THE LIGHT IN THE WEST

Noel H. Moynihan

Bachman and Turner
London (1978)

186 pages. Price £5.75

More than once since the Second World War the new Russian Empire has shown its claws, and used them, to maintain its tyranny, but nowhere more brutally or cynically than in its ruthless suppression of the Hungarian uprising in the autumn of 1956. The occupying troops having taken a beating from the Hungarian Freedom Fighters, the Russians retired and then struck again. Something like 150,000 seasoned and ruthless troops, supported by 5,000 tanks, embarked on a blitzkrieg of horrifying thoroughness. The shackles were on again. Refugees in their thousands sought to gain sanctuary in the West, and Austria was their nearest escape route.

Dr Moynihan read of this in *The Times* correspondence columns and in spite of his entrenchment in a young and budding practice, decided that he had to help. He gathered a small coterie of like-

minded friends, acquired a truck, and the operation began.

The author describes their struggles and their work for the pitiable stream of refugees filtering into Austria and Yugoslavia through the dreadful winter of 1956/57. He speaks harshly of some of the senior relief charities, whose attitudes ranged from a kinetic indifference to total obstruction, due both to their ignorance of the true state of affairs and their apparent disinclination to find out; they considered that everything was under control and resources adequate.

This is a refreshing account of altruistic amateur endeavour, but criticism may be made that too much space is given to the comings and goings of this little band of helpers, whose names read rather like a page from Debrett, and not enough to the actual plight of the unfortunates whom they were helping. But perhaps this criticism would be made only by a medical reader, and this book is intended for a more catholic circulation.

The title is perhaps unintentionally cynical. For the Hungarians the Light in the West, which they had been encouraged to hope would blaze like a beacon, was a mere will-o'-the-wisp. The West was busy with its own affairs and, as so frequently happens, the Freedom Fighters found themselves alone.

As a study of man's inhumanity to man this book is a depressing warning of the steepness of the slope on which we are all sliding, but the reader will be enlightened by its illustration that there are always people who will fight tyranny, and sometimes some who will care for its victims.

JOHN MILES

MANUAL OF MEDICAL THERAPEUTICS 22ND EDITION

Nicholas V. Costrini
and William M. Thomson

Little, Brown and Co.
Boston, USA (1977)

433 pages. Price £5.50

"Mild hypothyroidism. Treatment with 1 to 2 grains daily of thyroid USP or its equivalent may be started at once." This would not be out of place in an early edition of *Price's Textbook* but it certainly looked strange in the latest edition of an American book on therapeutics.

This book is written primarily for American medical students and interns. It is small enough to fit in a white coat

pocket, neatly presented, bound with a wide spiral metal binding, and well indexed. It covers most aspects of general medicine, each subject being divided into diagnosis and treatment.

While it is a useful book for medical students and perhaps housemen in this country, I cannot recommend it for general practitioners. Many drugs have similar names in the USA and England but some are quite different; salbutamol is not mentioned in the section on asthma; laboratory results are expressed in mg/100ml; and are we the only country using SI units?

On the occasions that I want to refer to a textbook, I want one which is comprehensible and detailed, especially on adverse drug therapy, which is dealt with inadequately here.

ROGER PEPIATT

NEONATAL MEDICINE

Malcolm L. Chiswick

Update Publications Ltd
London (1978)

101 pages. Price £3.95

Many doctors will be familiar with this book through advertisements that have appeared in *Update* and *Hospital Update*. It contains revised versions of articles which originally appeared in *Update*. The style and presentation of the book makes it enjoyable to read as the text contains many tables, diagrams, and photographs (most of them in colour). The subject is covered systematically with chapters on the unborn baby, resuscitation, examination of the newborn, low birth weight, nutrition, infection, jaundice, respiratory, neurological, genito-urinary, and gastro-intestinal problems.

The author makes some definitive statements about the indications for certain investigations and treatments with which other paediatricians may not agree. For instance, many would not investigate a full-term healthy infant with a bilirubin of 12 mg/100 ml at four days. Similarly an aggressive approach to the management of ideopathic respiratory distress syndrome (IRDS) is advocated; the importance of minimal handling in these babies is not mentioned; nasogastric nutrition is unfairly dismissed; and intravenous nutrition is advised in (apparently) all babies with IRDS. On the other hand the author adopts the conservative but safe approach which many neonatal problems merit when considering some topics.

This book will be of most interest to the senior house officer working in a neonatal unit, and general practitioner