

motherhood, examines the problems of particular subgroups such as the single and the very young, and probes the beliefs and attitudes of helping agencies. There then follows a practical chapter on the way women can be helped to get help, and finally aspects of counselling are discussed. There is a short but adequate index and an extensive bibliography. The list of contents is helpfully subdivided so that the reader can easily find his way to the topics that particularly interest him.

No-one will discover how to do counselling from reading this book, but those who do employ counselling (and that includes a good many general practitioners) when confronted by a woman, with no matter how blasé a disposition towards her unwanted pregnancy, cannot fail to widen their horizons and deepen their understanding. It is excellent value and can be highly recommended.

J. S. NORELL

A BAREFOOT DOCTOR'S MANUAL

Prepared by the Revolutionary Health Committee of Human Province

Routledge and Kegan Paul London and Henley (1978)

372 pages. Price £5.95

Most reviews in these columns have the main aim of informing the general practitioner about the book's usefulness; for example, "it should be in every practice library". No such utilitarian considerations can govern this review, since *A Barefoot Doctor's Manual* must be read only for the kind of reasons that we read a history book, or a biography, or listen to a record, or talk to our friends, or dig the garden, or push a child on a swing.

The one thing that a reading of this book does not do is convey a clear idea of what a rural barefoot doctor does. We learn in passing that he is a highschool graduate, and he is obviously very different from the rural medical aide of tropical Africa; but what are we to make of his daily work from the subject matter of his textbook? He starts with a section on general biology, and works through chapters on hygiene, diagnosis, therapeutics, and birth control.

The bulk of the work consists of something like a simplified textbook of medicine (including leukaemia but not

any venereal diseases) and a long section on Chinese medicinal plants. It is fascinating, with some of the unputdownable qualities of the London telephone directory, Wisden's cricketering almanac, and the Registrar General's classification of occupations. At the end one is reminded to what extent modern China is a revolutionary society trying to assimilate 30 years of communism into thousands of years of traditional culture. We should therefore not be surprised that the list of treatments for epidemic encephalitis B, for instance, includes acupuncture, an umbilical compress made from an eviscerated toad preserved in alcohol (or urine), mud packs to lower the temperature, several kinds of herbal concoctions (the word used in its strict sense of boiling plants in water which is then drunk), and a variety of symptomatic Western medicines, including intravenous infusions.

The only thing I would have liked was an explanatory page or two from the publishers about the kind of circumstances in which the barefoot doctor works; as it is, I am astonished at his apparent ability to diagnose and cope with such a wide range of diseases. Winston Churchill, in refuting the forecast of the French generals in 1940 that England would rapidly perish like a chicken with its neck wrung, said "Some chicken! Some neck!" It is tempting to think of this book in terms of "Some bare! Some foot!"

S. L. BARLEY

LABORATORY

H. W. K. Acheson (Ed.)

Kluwer Publishing Company London (1978)

Price £10.75 each instalment. Binder £1.80

The use made by general practitioners of laboratory services increases relentlessly year by year at a rate of about ten per cent per annum compound. In addition there has been a change in recent years from the pattern in which general practitioners used to request predominantly simple haematological investigations to their making use of much more sophisticated biochemical analyses.

The technical revolution in medicine is easily seen in pathology laboratories and almost every year brings some advance in the range of diagnostic supporting tests available to general practitioners.

The need for clearly presented information which is comprehensive enough to explain the basis of the tests yet simple enough to be easily read and remembered presents a considerable challenge and *Laboratory* is a new attempt to provide an answer. Published by Kluwer Publishing Limited of London, the firm which recently produced *Practice*, the contributors, a distinguished group of consultants, are led by Dr H. W. K. Acheson, General Practitioner and Senior Lecturer from Manchester, and the associate editors include Professor D. C. Morrell, the Wolfson Professor of General Practice at St Thomas's Hospital Medical School, London. Between them they have produced a hard-cover, loose-leaf book which is well printed in clear, well-spaced type.

All the usual tests are described and one outstandingly useful feature is a special section on those investigations which can appropriately be done within general practice itself. In these days of centralized standardization there has been a tendency to assume that every test ought to be done at a central laboratory because of the problem of quality control, whereas this book looks at side-room testing in a thoroughly logical way.

I liked the attempt to summarize key information simply at the beginning; for example, the page on SI units and the useful layout of some of the interpretation and comment sections.

Nevertheless, any book of this kind has to be compared with the best available standard work, which for me is Zilva and Pannall's *Clinical Chemistry in Diagnosis and Treatment*. On balance I still believe that Zilva and Pannall explain more clearly the basis of the common investigations of value to general practitioners and seem to me to score heavily by describing more clearly the common causes of raised or lowered values. This is the most serious present deficiency in *Laboratory*.

However, the final value of this new departure in clinical chemistry will depend on the loose-leaf supplements which will be used to keep *Laboratory* up to date and which will enable single pages or pairs of pages to be replaced immediately. This is this book's great advantage and it will be fair to judge it only after it has been in use for at least a couple of years.

D. J. PEREIRA GRAY

Reference

Zilva, J. F. & Pannall, P. R. (1975). *Clinical Chemistry in Diagnosis and Treatment*. 2nd edition. London: Lloyd-Luke.