
BOOK REVIEWS

THE EXPERIENCE OF DEPRESSION

Dorothy Rowe

John Wiley and Sons
Chichester (1978)

275 pages. Price £10.75

Depression is something we study in other people or feel in ourselves. In this book the author weds the two views in a fascinating complex. However, it is for the serious reader only because it is not an easy book to understand. The author is an experienced and deep thinking psychologist who borrows extensively from philosophy and literature—she has a penchant for T. S. Eliot—as well as her own clinical experience.

The main body of the work consists of nine studies of people “who at one time in their lives thought that life was not worth living”. These are presented in the form of edited tape recordings of consultations with comments by the author. Sadly, in spite of the wealth of detail, we do not really get to know these people. We would not recognize them if we met them in the street. The author says herself that she has not written of them as a novelist would and this is a pity, because only by imaginative descriptions could she portray them as living people. Virginia Woolf, and an unknown psychiatrist who describes his own depression, come over far more vividly in short extracts in the last section of the book. In spite of this failing we understand that these nine people, each so different from the other, have something in common. They are building round themselves a structure which isolates them from the rest of the world, using as the bricks metaphor, myth, and the power of language. “Language is the element in which we live.”

The author does not try to draw definite conclusions from her study. She expresses the hope that the reader will say what someone said of Thomas Aquinas, “that he did not make much of the answers but the questions were good”. This fair comment. The questions are very good and the thoughtful reader may find some answers in this book and seek others for himself.

C. P. ELLIOTT-BINNS

CHEMIST AND DRUGGIST DIRECTORY 1978

Benn Publications Ltd
Tonbridge (1978)

360 pages. Price £15

Identification of drugs brought by patients to the surgery, especially by new patients or temporary residents, is often difficult. A comprehensive method of identifying drugs should, therefore, be useful and such a system is found in this book. However, it is so comprehensive that it needs a careful study of the instructions for use if one is not to be overwhelmingly confused. This is a result of the large number of drugs available, however, and is not the fault of the authors, whose system is easily followed, once understood.

The identification section, which has a useful drug interaction guide, is the only section which most family doctors would find useful. The other sections, which mainly list names and addresses of manufacturers, suppliers, and retail outlets, and give information about hospital pharmacists, are more appropriate for drug company representatives and wholesale chemists.

A final section summarizes the relevant medicines acts and pharmaceutical services within the NHS.

In all, this is not a book to be recommended for a family doctor's library, especially when it costs £15.

R. J. F. STEELE

MORTALITY SURVEILLANCE 1968-1976 ENGLAND AND WALES

Office of Population Censuses
and Surveys (Medical Statistics
Division)

London (1977)

164 pages. Price £14.50

It is encouraging when book reviews in this *Journal* lead to substantial improvements in subsequent editions of the books reviewed and it is a pleasure to record that the Office of Population

Censuses and Surveys have reacted rapidly to a previous review of *Mortality Surveillance* which emphasized the inadequacy of producing large sets of tables without a numbering and an indexing system.

Both of these defects have now been remedied in the 1978 version, additional tables have been added, and whilst the final product is certainly expensive, it is much more useful as a source of reference for general practitioners.

D. J. PEREIRA GRAY

INTERNATIONAL CODING INDEX FOR DERMATOLOGY 1978

Suzanne Alexander and
Alan B. Shrank

Blackwell Scientific Publications
Oxford (1978)

90 pages. Price £2.00

Not everyone has a use for classifications. General practitioners need them if they are to make sense and order out of the many aspects of their work and workers in other branches of medicine need them too for there are few specialties in which detail cannot be usefully organized.

There is much close detail in subjects such as dermatology where eruptions are many and varied and often dignified by more than one name. An *International Coding Index for Dermatology* had to take all these into account and relate the rubrics to the International Classification of Disease, in its ninth revision.

Make up as it is of rubrics and code numbers this is no work for the general reader. Its place is in the research unit and the library where it will be available for occasional use in clinical and epidemiological work. It is the dermatologist's counterpart of the *International Classification of Health Problems in Primary Care*, and those few general practitioners who are dermatologists at least now find themselves doubly well served.

R. J. F. H. PINSENT