
BOOK REVIEWS

ESSENTIAL EXERCISES FOR THE CHILDBEARING YEAR

Elizabeth Noble

*John Murray
London (1978)*

175 pages. Price £2.95

Elizabeth Noble is an Australian physiotherapist specializing in obstetrics and gynaecology and practising in the USA. Her book is an easy-to-read manual for the expectant mother on how to take care of herself during pregnancy and the postnatal period.

She begins by explaining the anatomy of the musculature which supports the backbone and the intra-abdominal contents, and shows how these structures undergo increasing strain as pregnancy progresses. She stresses the importance of good posture and exercises in preventing some of the unpleasant symptoms and sequelae of pregnancy such as backache and pelvic floor laxity.

A whole chapter is devoted to the pelvic floor, which is important since most women are not so aware of the need to strengthen this area as they are of the need to improve their abdominal musculature post-partum. She warns of the consequences a slack pelvic floor may produce, such as urinary incontinence, vaginal prolapse, and reduced sexual enjoyment. The exercises, especially those for the abdominal musculature, are well illustrated and easy to follow and those exercises which are inadvisable to do, such as straight leg raising, are illustrated crossed out.

In addition to exercises for fitness, techniques for relaxation to cope with labour are described. These are similar to those taught in hospital antenatal relaxation classes and by the National Childbirth Trust.

As the author herself says, this book should not take the place of attendance at preparation classes, where the practising of relaxation and breathing techniques in the company of other expectant parents is beneficial and where there is an opportunity to discuss personal worries and fears with other members of the group. I feel, however, that this book would be a helpful adjunct to such classes for easy reference at any time, especially for its advice concerning the postnatal period which often tends to be neglected in classes.

The book is certainly to be recommended to any woman starting her childbearing and at £2.95 it is not beyond most pockets.

SUSAN STUBBINGS

QUEST FOR EXCELLENCE IN MEDICAL EDUCATION

Sir George Pickering

*Oxford University Press
Oxford (1978)*

100 pages. Price £4.50

Sir George Pickering is particularly well qualified to survey medical education in the British Isles because after getting a double first at Cambridge he taught biology at Westminster School, was Secretary of the Royal College of Physicians' Committee on Medical Education in the early 1940s, and subsequently became a Professor of Medicine in London and Oxford, and a Fellow of the Royal Society. He has also watched three of his four children going through a medical education.

This survey was commissioned by the Nuffield Provincial Hospitals Trust and looks at undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education. Sir George made it his business to hear the views of students and records that he has always been particularly interested in them.

General practitioners will be pleased to read: "I have been greatly impressed with the enthusiasm of both teachers and taught in the [vocational training] schemes with which I have become familiar in the course of this survey. They are producing a new breed of general practitioner which, in my opinion, will be much superior to anywhere in the world and of course much better than their predecessors. I also had the opportunity to see something of the schemes of training for primary care in the United States. These tend to be based on universities and teaching hospitals, and not on family practice, and are in my opinion inferior to those that have been developed in this country."

Sir George's main conclusions are that there has been a serious tendency to swamp medical students and young graduates with factual knowledge, and he records much evidence from those who claimed they had become bored with their courses. He emphasizes

throughout the importance of instilling habits of self-education and of kindling the flame of interest, rather than saturating it with masses of information.

He believes, and surely few will differ from him, that the purpose of the undergraduate period is to train the student's mind and he believes that this objective is now attained only "by a minority of medical graduates".

He is convinced that "the value or otherwise of a medical education depends more perhaps on the attitude of mind of the teachers than on the details of the curriculum", and he fears that the "efficiency of the bureaucratic control" may dampen the progress of medical innovators in the future.

He supports the role of the General Medical Council in taking a co-ordinated view of the whole of medical education but protests continuously "at the growing regimentation of the doctor in training". In particular he takes numerous swipes at the current wisdom of concentrating on multiple choice questions, and argues his case with an interesting appendix from the Science Masters Association report, which suggests that a second paper is needed which should test the candidate's ability to organize information, argue a case, and communicate his thoughts clearly.

This book will be of interest to those concerned with medical education and as such should interest general practitioner trainers. It is, of course, required reading for course organizers, regional advisers, postgraduate deans, and all those concerned with undergraduate medical education.

D. J. PEREIRA GRAY

A GUIDE TO GENERAL PRACTICE

Oxford Trainee Group

*Blackwell Scientific Publications
Ltd*

Oxford (1979)

111 pages. Price £1.80

Ten doctors who have recently completed their vocational training have written an excellent manual describing the operation of general practice in the United Kingdom.

On my introduction to general practice I can remember being rather overwhelmed by the bureaucracy which

seemed so different from what I had encountered in hospital. This pocket-sized handbook describes, amongst other things, which forms are for what, how to prescribe controlled drugs, and which deaths to report to the coroner. Wisely the authors refrain from declaring their personal preferences in terms of treatments; for instance, the list of content for the black bag includes 'anti-emetic' rather than 'Stemetil' or metoclopramide.

The book is written in short-note form and there are many useful tables ranging from immunization schedules to emergency 'Sections' of the Mental Health Act.

Some of the information listed is rather obvious and unlikely to be of much practical use (for example, principles of coping with sports injuries, or overdoses). On the other hand some sections need expanding. One concerns 'sudden death'. Deaths in the home are different from deaths in hospital, and the trainee, perhaps unexpectedly facing this situation on his own for the first time could benefit from more information. What should be done with the body? What happens to the various bits of the death certificate? Similarly, I would have liked to have seen more on National Insurance certification, the role of the Regional Medical Officer, and regulations concerning the keeping of dangerous drugs in the car.

The book is aimed primarily at trainees; indeed several pages are devoted to "The Training Year". This section, too, could be expanded to include further information on, for instance, the regulations concerning reimbursement of expenses incurred when renting extra accommodation, or how a telephone can be installed free into a trainee's home. Even so, trainees will certainly find this book useful; furthermore, I believe that all medical students should be armed with this guide before they start their general practice attachments: its price as well as its size will suit their pockets.

PETER SELLEY
Vocational trainee

PRIMARY CARE

*Cynthia J. Leitch and
Richard V. Tinker (Eds)*

*Davis
Philadelphia (1978)
589 pages. Price £12*

The rapid changes occurring in American health care have necessitated some

revolutionary developments in medical education and textbooks. Whereas our own British revolution in primary care has involved just the doctor and his patients, our transatlantic colleagues have had to cope with a whole new aspect of care—the role of the family nurse practitioner.

The startling thing about this book is that it is written by and for primary practitioners, both nurses and doctors. For the British reader, this is the great sticking point, for many of the chapters contain so much anatomy, physiology, and pathology that it is hard to believe that anyone without a formal medical background would find it of practical use.

Nevertheless, it is refreshing to read such a wide and discerning view of primary practice. The influence of the family, above all others, on the health of the individual and the relationship between maternal stress and the symptom-reporting of both mother and child are nicely dealt with; and all trainees in all disciplines, medical and paramedical, would learn from the authors' plea to clarify first the nature of the contract with the patient. Instead of protesting against abuses of the system, they say, we should stop erroneously assuming that people have the good sense and courtesy to come to the clinician because they are sick and want to get well!

Yet this is a textbook for the American reader. Its excellent coverage of the relevant demography and social material, its approach to screening, and all its references belong entirely to the USA. Its clinical ethos is theirs too with, for example, emphasis on the pathology of acute bronchitis involving secondary bacterial invasion and an implied routine use of antibiotics.

Students of comparative health care organization will be interested in this book but it will not find a place in general practice literature in this country.

M. J. AYLETT

ALCOHOLISM AND TREATMENT

*David Armor, J. Michael Polich,
Harriet B. Stambul*

*John Wiley & Sons Ltd
Bristol (1978)
349 pages. Price £11.75*

The book will not appeal to the average general practitioner. The main part of it consists of the Rand Corporation report in full, which was initially published in America in 1976 and aroused con-

siderable controversy. Although the press reported it as saying that after suitable treatment alcoholics might safely resume drinking, it is clear on reading it that this was not stated, although for a few alcoholics controlled moderate drinking may be more successful than attempts at abstinence. Unfortunately, the report has no hard facts to show which alcoholics are safe to begin drinking, and which are not.

Following the report comes a section presenting different reactions to it by numerous experts throughout the USA. Some of these appear as photocopies of the original letter sent in reply, and I personally found this irrelevant and irritating. One reads: "Dear Ernie, Here is the report you requested. Sincerely yours." That is all there is on the entire page.

Readers who have a strong interest in alcoholism will already have bought this book. For the general reader, there are better books available, and much cheaper.

DAVID HASLAM

MEDICINE: THE FORGOTTEN ART

C. Elliott-Binns

*Pitman Medical
Tunbridge Wells (1978)
199 pages. Price £4.95*

Christopher Elliott-Binns, a Northampton general practitioner, is a Greek scholar with a particular interest in Hippocrates, and—on the evidence of this book—no mean medical philosopher himself. He has here set down in a translation less archaic than the one we are familiar with (and in some ways less attractive) Hippocrates' aphorisms, and in a series of commentaries written around them points their relevance to present-day medicine while providing a distillate of his own wisdom.

He writes easily and perceptively, in a style reminiscent of Clark-Kennedy, from his own long experience as a family doctor and from thinking deeply about the things he has seen. The book is spared any trace of portentousness by its strong vein of common sense and a sense of humour often wry and self-mocking. He has wise things to say about relationships, including the tricky one arising from the affection and regard which all doctors come to feel for some of their patients.

On the huge increase in the consumption of sedative medicines he remarks pointedly that the truly drug-