

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-

addicted in general practice are those doctors who prescribe so profligately when they must know that medication can have at best only a marginal influence on their patients' problems. The whole of our work as general practitioners turns on our sense of proportion and sense of timing and he observes that many patients may be difficult to help in any other way than by a form of demand feeding.

This is a stimulating book whose teachings our trainees badly need but which perhaps only veterans can properly savour. The author believes a doctor's job is to help patients become more self-reliant. With the present-day mania for making a medical issue of every distress and disorder, and for professionalizing every gesture of help, his viewpoint, as he despondently admits, is unfashionable; and he doubts there can be many who share it. Let's hope that in this he is wrong.

J. S. NORELL

SELF-CARE IN HEALTH

John D. Williamson and Kate Danaher

Croom Helm
London (1978)

193 pages. Price £8.95

The illness 'iceberg' is now a familiar concept in primary care although the metaphor has perhaps become overstretched as the greater unseen part of the iceberg concerns not only asymptomatic and unrepresented illness but also health and the complex relationship between health and illness. A number of earlier publications have described individual facets of the iceberg's base, but here at last is a complete concise guide to its underwater geography. The water is often murky, as the authors are quick to point out, so that many areas remain uncharted.

This book is a thoughtful review of the literature of self-care in health, the place of self-care in the Health Service, and illness behaviour. The end chapters look for a policy for self-care and discuss its relationship to professionalism. There is an excellent bibliography and reference list.

The authors are a general practitioner and a sociologist who have both been associated with the Department of General Practice at Guy's Hospital Medical School. They have written for a wide audience, but many general practitioners may be disappointed that the impression left by the later chapters is of a rather uncertain prospective for

self-care policies which is inevitably coloured by the clearly described gaps in basic knowledge. Whilst non-medical readers may be unaware of these gaps, many of us are only too keenly aware of them and may need more positive encouragement to seek out local needs, to mount and evaluate self-care projects, or to co-operate with existing self-care ventures.

Like other Croom Helm publications this short book seems to be cheaply produced and printed and yet not cheap to buy. Nevertheless, it must now be an essential starting-point for anyone interested in self-care. This book should be in every postgraduate library and on all trainees' reading lists. It may also be commended to interested health visitors and district nurses.

SIMON SMAIL

THE MRCGP EXAMINATION A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO PREPARATION AND PASSING

A. J. Moulds, T. A. I. Bouchier
Hayes, and K. A. H. Young

MTP Press Ltd
Lancaster (1978)

131 pages. Price £4.95

This little book, written by three service officers who are associated with a very successful MRCGP course, is no more and no less than a very comprehensive guide to the preparation and passing of the MRCGP examination, as the title describes. It is well written, logically laid out, mercifully free of jargon, and full of useful bits of information for candidates. Each section of the examination is described in detail, and in addition the writers offer the kind of useful tips which clearly reflect their own practical experience. The section on the multiple choice question paper is particularly helpful, because it gives the reader a better idea of the nature and standard of questions asked in this part of the examination than anything the College has made available to candidates so far.

Incidentally, since the book is solely about the examination and how to pass it, it leaves the meaning of continuing membership of the College undiscussed. This omission, quite proper in a book about the examination, nevertheless helps to highlight an unresolved question of great importance. Should the College distinguish between those doctors who pass the examination simply to gain a higher qualification and those who pass it in order to enter into the rights and obligations of active

membership in addition? The writers of the book have simply made it more difficult for the Council of the College to postpone a decision much longer, and to this end they may have done both the College and general practitioners at large a service they had not planned for.

Every prospective examination candidate would be silly to consider taking the examination without first investing in this modestly priced volume. It is also a must for trainers, who ought to know about the examination, whether they are members of the College or not. Lastly, I believe that many ordinary College members will enjoy reading it, and doing some of the practical tests in the reassuring privacy of their own homes, if only to find out more precisely what their panel of examiners is up to in this still rather controversial field of assessment.

DONALD IRVINE

DIABETES EXPLAINED 3RD EDITION

Arnold Bloom

MTP Press Limited
Lancaster (1978)

159 pages. Price £5.50

In his preface to the third edition the author says: "It is my earnest hope that this book will continue to prove instructive to those who have diabetes and to those who help to look after them". I have no doubt that it will.

Since it is aimed mainly at diabetic patients and nurses, rather than general practitioners, the author has rightly concentrated on practical aspects of management and avoided biochemical detail.

The section on the tablet treatment of diabetes is particularly well written but I was disappointed with the sections on insulin treatment and the management of diabetic coma. In these, the conflicting needs of the doctor and the lay reader have not been reconciled, but in fairness it is difficult to see how they could have been in a book of this type.

The section on children with diabetes is written with compassion and understanding but general practitioners might well feel that a more aggressive approach to good control in this age group would have been better.

Whilst the book will certainly help the patients and nurses for whom it was intended, general practitioners who wish to broaden their knowledge in order to improve their management of diabetic patients would do better to look elsewhere.

C. WAINE