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# BOOK REVIEWS

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## THE HANDBOOK OF MEDICAL ETHICS

British Medical Association  
London (1980)

94 pages. Price £3 (£1 to Members)

It is a pleasure to welcome the publication of the long heralded *Handbook of Medical Ethics* by the British Medical Association. It is a worthy replacement for its rather pedestrian and little publicized predecessor, *Medical Ethics*, published in 1974.

The Central Ethical Committee has taken a radically different approach to its difficult subject. The document is offered as a stimulus to thoughtful discussion and must be regarded as a 'position paper' for future refinement. Its language is simple and straightforward; it is neither dogmatic, nor didactic and its various sections are offered as suggestions to guide doctors' actions in a way which is wholly praiseworthy. Application of the principles on which it is based cannot fail to help maintain both the trustworthiness and responsibility which is expected of our profession by the public in general, and the dignity and integrity of the individual doctor expected by his patient.

The book breaks new ground in the emphasis it places on the varying forms of relationship between doctor and patient and the nature of consent. Problems associated with screening, artificial insemination by donor, genetic counselling, allocation of resources, reduction of services to patients, individual responsibility for health, multidisciplinary care, and working with social workers are also dealt with for the first time. It embraces medical etiquette, reaffirming the exceptions to the rule of general practitioner/consultant referral and reiterating that attendance by one doctor or another should be without direct charge.

Not the least welcome addition is a bibliography, which is arranged by subject: there is great scope for progress in this development.

It is to be hoped that future editions will be able to offer greater guidance on the many aspects of confidentiality, the health care team, and the implications of clinical audit.

This is a book which should be available in every general practitioner's surgery.

R. MACG. AITKEN

## DEPARTMENTS OF GENERAL PRACTICE IN THE UK: A GAZETTEER

Prepared by Dr Douglas MacAdam and David Metcalfe for the Association of Teachers of General Practice

University of Glasgow (1979)

Price £2.50

Only those most heavily involved with teaching (and that almost entirely of undergraduates) will want to look at this gazetteer. It is a comprehensive survey of all the departments, listing the members of staff, and describing their clinical practices (if any) and associated teaching practices, the teaching methods they use, their educational objectives (it is to the great credit of almost all departments that they have written them down), their relationship with post-graduate education and any research being undertaken.

The general impression is of a great deal of useful and laudable activity. Will the laggards be stimulated to catch up with the front-runners, or will we see another example of the excellent being the enemy of the merely good?

S. L. BARLEY

## THE CHILDREN'S COMMITTEE FIRST ANNUAL REPORT 1978/79

Brook House, 2-16  
Torrington Place,  
London

The First Report of the Children's Committee for 1978/79 has now been published. The accompanying press release highlighted the national conference on the reduction of perinatal mortality held at the Royal College of Physicians in December 1979. Although the invited speakers were representative of obstetricians, paediatricians, midwives, and even administrators, general practice was conspicuous by its absence—this despite the enormous contribution made by general practitioners to antenatal and postnatal care.

In the body of the Report there are disappointing omissions, the saddest being the failure to recognize that general practitioners are one group of doctors who consistently work with families over many years.

On page four it is stated that "in many respects the health and social needs of children are complementary and inseparable." It seems surprising that the Committee did not realize that general practitioners reached this view a long time ago!

The emphasis on research is to be welcomed, as are the proposals to integrate child and adolescent psychiatric services. The Royal College of General Practitioners is committed to a policy of raising standards and of encouraging research on how this can be achieved. It is to be hoped that co-operation with the Children's Committee will occur.

After reading the Report one is left with a doubt about whether the Committee is representative enough of those who are actually delivering health care to the children of this country.

C. WAINE

## INTRODUCTION TO GENERAL PRACTICE

Michael Drury and Robin Hull

Baillière Tindall  
London (1979)

232 pages. Price £3.75

When, after some years in general practice, doctors discuss their work, the problems of patient care, or some aspect of practice organization, much is left unsaid. So much experience is common to all that we tend to forget that much of the time we are reading between the lines. The student at medical school has as yet no share in the common pool of knowledge of general practice. We have had to wait for this book to realize that undergraduates have to have much spelt out for them, and the authors have taken their courage in both hands to define what was hitherto thought to be indefinable.

There was the danger that they might talk down to their readers, but they have escaped this hazard and have given us an eminently readable book even though we are no longer undergraduates. Certainly nothing like this introduction existed in the far-off days when we were. The pejorative abbreviation 'GP' appears once only in the text (p.50). Proofing has occasionally slipped. Why is it that typesetters delight in spelling 'symptom' with a terminal 'n' and proofreaders so often overlook it?