
BOOK REVIEWS

THE CLINICAL PRACTICE OF ADOLESCENT MEDICINE

Jerome T. Y. Shen (Ed)

Appleton-Century-Crofts
New York (1980)

748 pages. Price £23.75

The consideration of medical problems associated with specific age groups is not new. Paediatrics and geriatrics each have a considerable bibliography of their own. The bibliography of adolescence is not so large, but the editor of this book has, with the help of 65 contributors (all American), made a sincere attempt to add to it. Although it is written with the problems of adolescents in the USA principally in mind, most of the problems discussed are universal. The book has an undoubted relevance to medicine in the UK, and to general practice in particular.

Some of the chapters, such as those on rheumatic disease and gastrointestinal disease, are concerned with conditions that may occur at any age but are considered here from the point of view of the adolescent. The most important chapters are those relating to physical development and the psychosocial problems of adolescence. Those on sexuality and obstetric/gynaecological problems are perceptive. Many of the specific problems associated with emerging adulthood, such as difficulties in learning, speech, copying, adaptation, and emotional development are discussed in depth with understanding, and merit attention. The editor states his objective to be to produce a reference text for primary care physicians, which in the USA represents a wider field than family practitioners alone, with an emphasis upon practical applications. Predictably, most of the references are of US origin and the practical applications refer to US 'office' practice. Nevertheless, many of the suggestions concerning 'office' practice are adaptable to the British consulting room.

The book is dedicated to Dr J. R. Gallagher, the doyen of adolescent medicine in the USA, who contributes a foreword where he points out that adolescent malleability, "the agile pliancy of youth", provides the last opportunity, with comparative ease and likelihood of success, to prevent the early development of some of the problems of later life. All general practitioners

would agree with this philosophy, and some might add that adolescence, with its piquancy, provides a fertile field for sowing the seeds for better use by patients of the health services.

This is not a book which general practitioners would be expected to purchase individually (*pace* the price), but it is one that should be available for reference in the libraries of group practices and postgraduate medical centres. Few will fail to learn from its pages.

H. W. K. ACHESON

A GOOD START. SUCCESSFUL BREAST FEEDING

Edmund Hey

Available from the Area Health
Education Office
48 Osborne Road
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE2 2AI.

11 pages. Price 7p plus postage

Health education directed at groups requiring advice, counselling and support because of a specific problem is a more useful exercise than is indiscriminate propaganda. In some fields the need is well met, in others, such as breast feeding, there is a glaring deficiency. To give clear advice without being too dogmatic, to provide answers for every eventuality without being too diffuse, to be concise for those wanting brevity, and yet to be informative for those wanting answers to all the whys and wherefores, requires a very astute balancing act.

The Midwifery and Child Health Service, Newcastle upon Tyne, have attempted to provide just such a *vade mecum* for the nursing mother. It has pulled together the collective wisdom of a group of doctors and midwives. Their thoughts have been put into words in the space of nine comprehensive but easily readable pages by Edmund Hey, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Child Health. The brevity and readability of the booklet is of profound importance because its need is greatest amongst those who are least educated.

It succeeds in its attempt to provide simple easily digested advice on breast feeding without tears. It could be even more concise and valuable and, at the same time, avoid some duplication, if it combined its two artificial divisions of

text proper and "Notes and Queries" into one document.

G. R. FREEDMAN

PRIMARY CARE

John Fry (Ed)

William Heinemann Medical Books
London (1980)

530 pages. Price £17.50

The problem with the curate's egg is that different curates probably like different bits. My problem with this book is that it does not seem to hang together. The subjects covered are so large and are treated at such different levels that considerable mental agility is required to switch from one to another. For example, to go from the broad philosophical canvas painted by Gordon McLachlan on the problems of providing health care to the detailed, intense study by Reedy on teamwork, is too much, and only tolerable if one accepts the book as a collection of essays. This must be due to the fact that the book is aimed at too wide an audience: "Essential reading," the blurb says, "for teachers, clinicians, planners, administrators, economists, and politicians." There must be someone, somewhere for whom it is not essential reading!

Having said this there is some virtue in having so much gathered together in one volume from 29 distinguished writers: it is well produced, well referenced, and has a good index.

The book is divided into six sections covering, in essence, the role of primary care, its content and organization, and its educational requirements. At the end there is a section on the consumer into which has strayed a chapter on colleges and academics for which, presumably, no better place could be found.

Some of these essays are excellent, intellectually stimulating and concise; others are more pedestrian, containing material which has appeared elsewhere; and one or two seem well-nigh incomprehensible.

It is not essential reading for every clinician in general practice, but most, when browsing through the shelves of their postgraduate library, would find some parts of this curate's egg to their taste.

V. W. M. DRURY