
BOOK REVIEWS

AVOIDING HEART TROUBLE

Edith Rudinger

*Consumers' Association
London (1980)*

135 pages. Price £3.95 (paperback)

The Consumers' Association has now produced a number of short books on medical topics for the public. *Avoiding Heart Trouble* is the latest addition to the series. Initially these books could only be obtained directly from the Consumers' Association but they are now distributed to booksellers in the usual way. However, despite wider availability, the series is clearly written with the typical *Which?* reader in mind and this book is no exception. Although the first chapter begins with an admirably simple explanation of the circulatory system, the language used and the overall presentation is nearer that of the minority interest quality newspapers than of the more popular tabloids.

The first third of the book deals with the anatomy and physiology of the circulatory system in a style that is reminiscent of a traditional medical textbook, but with suitable deference to the lay audience. Following this is a discussion of risk factors for ischaemic heart disease and ways to avoid them. However, since virtually all possible risk factors are discussed, the reader might be left bemused as to exactly where he should start if he does intend to modify his lifestyle. There is a useful account of the techniques for giving up smoking but the overriding importance of smoking in relation to other risk factors does not seem to be sufficiently emphasized.

Finally there is a section on angina and further discussion about heart attacks. The description of first aid for heart attacks includes the customary pictures and instructions for mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and external cardiac massage. The text makes brief reference to first-aid courses but fails to emphasize that these resuscitation techniques cannot be learnt from either this book or any other, but are practical skills which can only be acquired through practical instruction.

As a review for the intelligent literate layman, this book should be of value and is generally sound. It could usefully be recommended to patients with some evidence of heart disease as an aid to secondary prevention. However, the language and style make it of limited

value for those patients who need simple direct advice about avoiding heart trouble.

S. A. SMAIL

CARING AND CURING: A PHILOSOPHY OF MEDICINE AND SOCIAL WORK

R. S. Downie and Elizabeth Telfer

*Methuen and Co. Ltd
London (1980)*

174 pages. Price £3.95

Interest in the ethical background of medicine and fruitful contact between philosophers, doctors and informed laymen has been a relatively recent development in this country; this makes the new and very clear view of medical and welfare ethics that this book offers especially welcome.

To date, discussion of ethical issues has often been poor, both in the literature and the media. This is partly because those involved are inexperienced, and partly because we are perhaps not yet sure how best to reach a better understanding of the wider issues that such debate raises. There have been a number of attempts to do this on television, some good, some atrocious; there is the recent series of Reith Lectures; there is a special journal and a number of new publications which have approached the subject from different points of view. Yet many of these are based on specific religious beliefs which make them less useful to readers who do not share the same views.

A few books have appeared, however, which have managed to maintain a balanced, comprehensive discussion in language which is informative. Most accessible to general practitioners may be those (like Dr A. V. Campbell's *Moral Dilemmas in Medicine*), which begin by looking at problem areas; yet this can be rather like learning medicine only in a casualty department.

In contrast, what the authors of this new book offer is a broad discussion of the ideas and values that underpin the actions of the caring professions. They have managed to introduce in context philosophical concepts and schools of thought, and provide sensible examples that the ordinary reader can grasp. Seeing an underlying unity of purpose in the

activities of social workers and doctors, they have dealt with the professions side by side. This has often led to challenging discussion. They also look at the values that we hold, the principles to which we turn and the political landscape in which we may choose or be required to act. They are critical of the claims of natural and social science to produce a satisfactory explanation of human behaviour and conclude that a broader training in conceptual skills is necessary if either medicine or social work is to cope satisfactorily in the future. A final bold synthesis on "the meaning of life" completes a book that recommends itself thoroughly to all doctors with time to look more deeply and critically at their work. Although *Caring and Curing* cannot be part of every practice's library, it should be required reading for anyone who is deeply involved in teaching, either as a trainer or in a medical school. The authors clearly feel that to philosophize can be exciting; the idea is certainly infectious.

ROGER HIGGS

SOCIAL SKILLS IN INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

*Owen Hargie, Christine Saunders
and David Dickson*

*Croom Helm Ltd
London (1981)*

198 pages. Price £11.95 hardback,
£5.95 paperback

Talking about how others behave in company is fun, and a book on the subject might be expected to sparkle at least a little. As its title threatens, this one is too earnest to enjoy; it has to be read in the hope that it will be instructive.

The target audience is huge: everyone professionally involved in communication with other people. The subjects covered are non-verbal communication, reinforcement, questioning, reflecting, set induction and closure (that is, starting and finishing an interaction), explanation, listening and self-disclosure.

I found that the book fell into three parts. The first was pedestrian, naïve and badly written. It was not wrong, it was just boring; I would have given up if I had not been writing this review. The