

GENERAL PRACTICE LITERATURE

NEW BOOKS

THE PHYSICIAN'S PRACTICE

Eisenberg, J. and Williams, S. V. (eds)

John Wiley
New York (1981)

274 pages. Price £10.00

This is a well-written and thoroughly practical textbook of practice organization for doctors at all levels—general practitioners, family practitioners and every kind of specialist and specialoid—in the United States. Little of it is applicable in Britain, though there are some interesting ideas well worth considering in any large practice. Its chief value in the UK is as an introduction to the way American doctors act and therefore think. For this it is very useful, either for doctors planning to visit the States, or for those who want to understand the assumptions of American medical visitors. Home/house and night visits/calls are not listed in the index or discussed at any point I could discover in the text, and my question on how American doctors can deal with left ventricular failure without getting out of bed and visiting the patient at home remains unanswered. The contrast with our own classic, Pritchard's *Manual of Primary Health Care*, is remarkable; we have a richness of perspective altogether absent from American practice, but I have never felt more conscious of the poverty of our resources.

JULIAN TUDOR HART
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EYES AT WORK

Anthony Buckley

*The Medical Commission on
Accident Prevention*
London (1981)

44 pages. Price £1.50 including postage

Health and safety at work is a field much neglected by the medical profession and, even in organizations which employ medical officers, the majority

are part-time general practitioners. *Eyes at Work* is a useful little booklet, described by Lord Porritt in his preface as of great value to all those concerned with safety at work, from top management to shopfloor workers.

Although written for the layman, it is important for all general practitioners interested in occupational health to know about a publication like this so that they may introduce it to those concerned with safety at work. It would not be a bad idea, either, for doctors involved in health and safety work to read the booklet themselves, because it does contain many useful pieces of information that are not included in the textbooks. Besides the eye, it talks about light, working conditions, different types of radiation and their effect on the eyes and protection of eyes; it also explodes a few myths, for example about welding while wearing contact lenses and the harmful effects of VDUs. There is also some very useful information about the law and eyes at work.

This is a useful booklet which should be part of every Safety Committee member's library.

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HEALTH CARE AND LIFE STYLE

D. N. Darby, S. Glaser and
I. F. Wilkinson

*University of New South Wales
Kensington (1981)*

138 pages. Price A\$10.95

This is an important book. It reports a study carried out in Australia on common health and disease problems and how the public deals with them.

The authors were based at Sydney and advised by Ian Webster, professor of community medicine. Over 1,000 randomly selected adults recorded their health and non-health and their actions over two time periods in 1979/80. This exercise was somewhat similar to those carried out by Ann Cartwright and others in the UK and elsewhere, and the findings are broadly similar and complementary: the health problems common in Australia are similar to our own—respiratory infections, emotional disorders and rheumatics.

What did the patients do? In 40 per cent the symptoms were ignored; in 20 per cent home remedies were used; in 20 per cent medicines were bought at the local chemist; in only 20 per cent of instances was professional medical advice sought. These actions and non-actions raise some fundamental questions on planning future health services.

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MEDIEVAL WOMAN'S GUIDE TO HEALTH. THE FIRST ENGLISH GYNAECOLOGICAL HANDBOOK

Beryl Rowland

Croom Helm
London (1981)

192 pages. Price £10.95

It is only in the more recent past that the medical profession has been so firmly opposed to female practitioners. In medieval times, as Professor Rowland tells us in her illuminating introduction, this was not so. The manuscript here printed with a facing translation was produced by a professional scribe in the early fifteenth century from a so-far undiscovered earlier text. Written so that women could help their own sex, the general procedure is to state the complaint and describe symptoms, cause and cure. In gynaecological diagnosis great importance is attached to the disposition of the humours. The uterus is here accorded a separate existence—the treatment for prolapse being to apply evil-smelling substances below, so that the uterus will escape upwards, together with fragrant-smelling remedies to the nose to encourage this curative ascent. There is realism, too: "If these are of no use, only God can cure."

The herbal remedies were probably expensive, implying a well-cultivated manor or nunnery garden, and would certainly take a long time to prepare, with much boiling and straining through fine linen cloth, as for instance with doves' droppings boiled in wine for a plaster, "or one may drink the wine". Cheaper recipes are sometimes given "if the woman is poor". A glossary of plant