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# GENERAL PRACTICE LITERATURE

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## NEW BOOKS

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### GENERAL PRACTICE (TUTORIALS IN POSTGRADUATE MEDICINE SERIES)

Eric Gambrill (ed.)

Heinemann Medical Books  
London (1982)

364 pages. Price £17.50

"Passive learning from other specialists treating referred patients in hospital is not sufficient for the continuing education of the general practitioner of today and tomorrow." So the sleeve announces the book's agenda, a challenging lapel badge. Each topic and each of the 25 contributors, half of them general practitioners, was chosen personally by Eric Gambrill. How far has each author succeeded in "reviewing current practice and the present state of knowledge, identifying unresolved points and providing a guide to further reading in an important area of family medicine"?

Several chapters are a joy—original, thoughtful, penetrating, undogmatic, well argued and fully referenced—in particular, David Brooks on Urinary Tract Infection, Sylvia Limerick on Cot Death, Douglas Chamberlain on Coronary Heart Disease and Benno Pollack on Alcoholism stand out. The questions for discussion at the end of each chapter are a highly successful innovation. The chapter on Screening by Cyril Hart was refreshingly realistic, and more specific and scrupulous in its hopes after the heady days of 1975's *Screening in General Practice*. The volume is beautifully produced, with a friendly typeface that stimulates the appetite.

But the editor has not fulfilled his task. How could Gillian Strube, on page 1, say that the notion of general practitioners freeing themselves from caring for people with minor ailments in order to manage larger lists and staff casualty and outpatient departments is "uncontroversial"? Her section on Health Education is pitifully referenced; statements like "the studies that have been carried out", "doctors decided that..." and "other studies show..." must be supported. Anthony Martin's

chapter on Cardiovascular Disease in the Elderly informs from on high: his evidence is based on four sources, three of them review articles by himself. We are ordered by Anthony Hicklin in his chapter on Backache: "Send the serious and new cases home to rest in bed for two weeks." Really? Who says it makes any difference in the end? His sentences are littered with imperatives—some even in bold type! These are seven pages of dogma without one single supporting reference. The final sentence commands us: "Never believe everything a single expert tells you." Sound advice at last. Unfortunately, he omitted to discuss the importance of urinary incontinence, saddle numbness or foot-drop in backache.

Feeble, brain-stem observations like "If the patient is a smoker, he should be advised to give it up", in a chapter on diabetes, are a waste of space. Why? What is the evidence that advice helps? It is important to know. To tell the reader to review for himself the evidence for the benefit of good blood sugar control is to duck the author's task.

Yet, a vibrant and optimistic book, conceptually fresh; it contains much more good than bad. It is as near to a definitive statement on intelligent general practice thought, word and deed as anyone has got.

N. C. A. BRADLEY  
*Locum General Practitioner, Exeter*

### THE CAUSES OF CANCER

R. Doll and R. Peto

Oxford Medical Publications  
Oxford (1982)

63 pages. Price £4.95

For any general practitioner who asks "why him?", "why her?", or even "why me?", £5 is a small sum to pay for this masterly review of the international epidemiological evidence on the causes of cancers. As Richard Doll has pointed out many times before, there is no common site or variety of cancer that is not rare in some part of the world, and no cancer found rarely in one place that is not to be found commonly somewhere else. As there is very little support for

the view that these differences are based on racially distributed genetic factors, this must mean that most cancers are ultimately preventable by planned changes in human environment, using the most liberal definition of that term.

The evidence gathered here was prepared for the United States Congress, and some of the calculations are therefore directed to the potential saving of life in America, but this hardly impairs its value for readers in other countries.

I commend this book to every trainer, every trainee, every course organizer and every practising doctor who still retains an interest in why things happen. It is ironic that this monograph should appear just at the time when the United States Government seems determined to ignore the evidence, dismantle the environmental programme of the previous administration and press on with its blind faith that what is good for business is bound to be best for human beings. If it is widely read here, perhaps we can do something to stop things going the same way.

JULIAN TUDOR HART  
*General Practitioner, Glyncorrwg*

### SMOKING: PSYCHOLOGY AND PHARMACOLOGY

H. Ashton and R. Stepney

Tavistock  
London (1982)

222 pages. Price £9.95

This is a welcome and comprehensive review of pharmacological knowledge of a habit common to almost half the adult population and is the most important cause of preventable morbidity and premature death in developed countries. After a succinct history of tobacco-smoking, the book considers scientific aspects. The acetylcholine-like facility of nicotine to influence synaptic neurotransmission is clearly described, and the apparently paradoxical aspects of smoking—its association with heightened arousal on the one hand and with relaxation on the other—is explained by a biphasic excitatory and inhibitory effect on nervous pathways.

The concluding chapters discuss how a better understanding of smoking behaviour can assist smoking cessation and the possibility of less hazardous smoking. Evidence of the usefulness of nicotine chewing gum is reviewed, with the conclusion that it is a logical method to use in helping some smokers, especially those consuming large numbers of cigarettes.

This book is an authoritative and readable account of a habit which, on average, kills at least two of every general practitioner's patients every year. It deserves to be widely read.

GODFREY FOWLER  
*Clinical Reader in General Practice,  
University of Oxford*

## PSYCHOPHARMACOLOGY OF SLEEP

D. Wheatley (ed.)

Raven Press  
New York (1981)  
246 pages. Price \$39.44

The average general practitioner is likely to see at least 100 new cases of sleep disturbance each year, and have perhaps another 50 patients on regular hypnotics—a moderate problem, but a demanding one for the thoughtful doctor. This collection from a symposium on sleep is therefore important.

Most general practitioners would find the papers far too detailed in terms of pharmacology and physiology, but it is certainly a good source of background information. The chapters on benzodiazepines and pharmacokinetics come from leading researchers in the USA and Holland, and can be strongly recommended. David Wheatley, a general practitioner, has had the onerous task of editing the papers and I feel he could have insisted on clearer conclusions or summaries at the end of each chapter. His own studies of practical somnopharmacology demonstrate that it is quite possible for general practitioners to involve themselves in research in this difficult field, but I was surprised to find the subject of drug dependence hardly mentioned.

Perhaps the ambivalence of some of the articles is expressed in the words of Professor Fahy of Galway: "the scientific basis of hypnotics is not as firmly established as is sometimes suggested".

A. D. CLIFT  
*General Practitioner, Manchester*

## EVALUATION AND CLINICAL MANAGEMENT OF DIZZINESS AND VERTIGO

A. J. Firestone

John Wright  
Bristol (1982)  
218 pages. Price £13.25

The ability to maintain a stable, upright posture depends on the integrity of the vestibular labyrinth, proprioceptive information and vision. Any or all of these systems may produce instability through degenerative disease, and their integration may be compromised in the elderly as a result of ischaemia. The diagnosis of the common complaints of dizziness and vertigo is not always easy, and management can be frustrating, so that one may shy away from it all one's professional life. Yet, like most subjects, the more one considers it, the more likely it is to become interesting, provided that the information source is clear and stimulating, as it is here. Contributions from specialists in physiology, ophthalmology, neurology, speech, ENT, pharmacology, family medicine and psychiatry, set out clearly the wide considerations opened up by disturbance of the sensory function and motor co-ordination. Good editing has ensured that overlap does not occur. The illustrations are helpful and clear, and there is a self-assessment section at the end.

M. K. THOMPSON  
*General Practitioner, Croydon*

## IMMUNOLOGICAL AND CLINICAL ASPECTS OF ALLERGY

M. H. Lessof  
MTP Press  
Lancaster (1981)  
443 pages. Price £24.95

Professor Lessof's book is aimed at all postgraduate clinicians involved with allergy—chest physicians, paediatricians, dermatologists and general practitioners. As a general rule any book intended for an audience with such diverse needs is doomed to failure, but it is a measure of Professor Lessof's skill that the book is likely to succeed. There is an introductory section on the basic scientific aspects of allergy and their clinical application. Biological and immunological advances are presented in a balanced way and lead into chapters on

diagnostic tests. There is an excellent chapter on allergy in infancy and childhood and this is followed by detailed chapters on skin allergy, gastro-intestinal reactions, respiratory allergy and allergy in minor target organs such as the eye, ear and kidney. Sections on drugs and hyposensitization therapy complete a really first-class book.

Let it be said at once that this book is detailed in its coverage, painstakingly researched and liberally referenced. However, it is precisely because allergy is such a common problem that the general practitioner requires detailed knowledge of its presentation and management. It has been estimated that 50 per cent of exacerbations of asthma are treated with antibiotics. My only regret is that there is no general practitioner contributor to the book. Nevertheless it can be thoroughly recommended.

D. BROOKS  
*General Practitioner, Manchester*

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## BOOKS FOR PATIENTS

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### ACUPUNCTURE. ITS PLACE IN WESTERN MEDICINE

George Lewith  
Thorsons Publishers Ltd  
Wellingborough (1982)  
127 pages. Price £6.95 hardback,  
£3.95 paperback

Although ostensibly for the lay reader, I hope that many doctors will use this book as an introduction to acupuncture, since amongst a multiplicity of books on the subject, few others seek to explain the ancient Chinese concepts of disease and its treatment within the context of Western medicine.

Those who have never seen acupuncture in practice will find that the illustrations, although poorly reproduced, give a good idea of what to expect. With logical explanations, a practical attitude towards research and a strong sympathy for Chinese culture, Dr Lewith has produced a very readable book which sets a high standard for this new series on alternative therapies.

SIMON HAYHOE  
*General Practitioner, Colchester*