
MEDICAL LITERATURE

BOOK REVIEWS

A difficulty for general practitioners is that they are regarded as potential readers of literature covering an extremely wide range of subject-matter. It is intended that this section of the Journal shall henceforth be a forum where those who are faced with the clinical pressure of general practice can appraise new texts. The principles and priorities of our young discipline are being stated with increasing clarity, and it is against the yardsticks of relevance, originality and style that new texts will be judged.

This month, four doctors in a South Glamorgan group practice (D. A. Cadman, P. H. Edwards, G. F. Morgan and J. W. D. Armstrong) have reviewed the first four books listed below.

NIGEL STOTT
Reviews Editor

ENTERING THE WORLD

The De-Medicalization of Childbirth

Michael Odent

Marion Boyars, London (1984)

155 pages. Price £6.95

Those of us tutored in obstetrics while clad in bilious green, surrounded by a cacophony of chat and clanging instruments, tripping over intraspinal drip lines, and with enough light to illuminate a football stadium will find this translation from the French original a refreshing and readable diversion. Unlike most diversions, however, the book does not leave one moving slowly along a mental side-track but promotes the mainline question: 'Are we doing things the right way?'

Part I is a lucid, even poetical, explanation of the philosophy behind the methods. Part II explains the methods derived from the philosophy. There is also a helpful 'glossary for laymen'. The philosophy of Dr Odent (and his mentor, Dr Leboyer) is that, by minimizing the pain and trauma caused by professional interference, noise, instrumentation and bright light, the love and tenderness which should be felt can be

felt. Women and their husbands are taught that 'birthing' is an extreme emotional experience from which spiritual benefit can be gained.

The methods are now well known but it is still interesting to read about them. In Part II of the book Dr Odent pre-empted criticism by citing evidence in favour of his methods.

Conclusion: good value, a good read, but sadly not yet applicable in most NHS hospitals.

D.A.C.

VIDEO IN MENTAL HEALTH PRACTICE

Ira Heilveil

Tavistock Publications, London (1984)

209 pages. Price £4.95 (paperback)

This handbook shows how a technological advance allows consultations, therapy and group activities to be recorded and provide useful feedback. The applications of video to mental health practice range from the interesting to the bizarre.

Heilveil lays down sensible guidelines for use of video recordings while supervising students; he suggests that video should be used as an intermittent aid to highlight nonverbal behaviour between students and patient. The fact that a tape can be viewed repeatedly is an asset during the technique of desensitization, and in the area of phobias it bypasses the necessity of providing exotic stimuli such as live snakes. The author also proposes a novel technique for confronting the alcoholic: viewing one's drunken state while sober is a truth that cannot be denied—the camera never lies.

The main thrust of the book deals, however, with psychotherapeutic techniques—the relationship between the therapist and the client. In this context video appears to increase the time devoted to therapy exponentially: the 'standard hour' must be doubled if the tape is to be reviewed. This is unrealistic for general practitioners, who usually provide feedback to their patients via a 'flash' technique during the five to 10 minute appointment. Nor do I believe that Heilveil shows that detailed examination and re-examination of the minutiae of the consultation is of great

benefit—the camera as a co-therapist may be novel, but many readers will remain sceptical.

The final section of the book looks to the future. The techniques described—split screens, multi- and superimposed images—provide examples of psychotherapeutic hyperbole rather than being immediately applicable to general practice in the UK.

P.H.E.

ATLAS OF EMERGENCY MEDICINE (2nd edition)

Peter Rosen and George L. Sternbach

Williams and Wilkins, London (1984)

234 pages. Price £80.00 (approx)

This is a beautifully produced, readable book, aimed at the emergency room physician in the USA. The authors describe their own approach to practical emergency procedures without reference to any conflicting opinions.

The text is divided into 11 sections. One section deals with cardiopulmonary resuscitation, while the others deal with a single physiological system. Each section has a concise introduction outlining the indications for the procedures described. The descriptions of the techniques are accompanied by clear, high quality line-drawings on the facing pages. The figure illustrating laryngoscopy prior to endotracheal intubation with the tongue on the wrong side of the mouth is the only minor error I noticed. The British casualty officer, military surgeon or general practitioner involved in immediate care may find the section on the thorax somewhat daunting, with its description of open-chest cardiac massage and aortic cross-clamping, but many other more common life-saving emergency procedures are well illustrated.

Throughout the text there are helpful tips, such as a nonreturn valve for pneumothorax drainage made from the finger of a surgical glove and that a nasogastric tube kept in a refrigerator is easier to pass than one kept at room temperature.

I was surprised to find no mention of the oesophageal obturator airway which has found a place in emergency care in