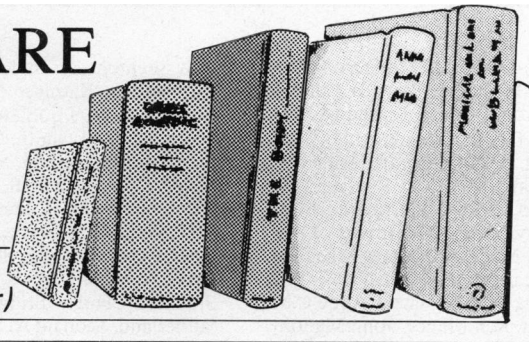


# PRIMARY CARE BOOK SHELF



D.J. PEREIRA GRAY  
J.D.E. KNOX  
T.R. DAVIES  
R.J. ROBERTSON  
CLARE WILKINSON

NIGEL STOTT (*Reviews Editor*)

## A DIFFICULT BALANCE

Editorial peer review in medicine. Rock Carling Monograph, 1985  
Stephen Lock  
*The Nuffield Provincial Hospitals Trust, London (1985)*  
172 pages. Price £9.00

## ETHICAL ISSUES IN FAMILY MEDICINE

Ronald J. Christie and C. Barry Hoffmaster  
*Oxford University Press (1986)*  
194 pages. Price £20.00

## THE EYE IN GENERAL PRACTICE

Eighth edition  
C.R.S. Jackson and R.D. Finlay  
*Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh (1985)*  
145 pages. Price £12.00

## RETINAL DETACHMENT

A colour manual of diagnosis and treatment  
Jack J. Kanski  
*Butterworths, London (1986)*  
161 pages. Price £29.50

## MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR DOCTOR

A family guide to dealing with your GP  
Jennifer King, David Pendleton and Peter Tate  
*Thames Methuen, London (1986)*  
126 pages. Price £1.95

The annual Rock Carling lecture has acquired a substantial reputation as a thoughtful analysis of aspects of medicine, and the custom of the Nuffield Provincial Hospitals Trust to publish it as a book each year makes it much more widely available than other lectures of its kind. The 1985 lecture 'A difficult balance' was delivered by Stephen Lock, Editor of the *British Medical Journal* and he used the lecture as a platform to examine the role of peer review in medicine with special reference to editorial work and grant assessment.

The result is fascinating for all who submit articles to professional journals or who are involved in any way in making judgements about them both for publication and for grants.

Dr Lock's achievement is that he has identified a process of central importance to standards in medicine and subjected it to critical analysis. Furthermore he has tested the system with some personal research. As editor of one of the leading general medical journals he is unusually well placed to have done this and he must be warmly congratulated not just on studying this subject academically but on researching it as well.

After classifying the various theoretical advantages and disadvantages of the peer review system, he describes a prospective computer-based analysis of every consecutive article submitted to the *British Medical Journal* for about nine months in 1979. For the first time (as far as I know) four groups of assessors have been systematically contrasted: the Editor himself, a col-

league, an expert referee and the traditional 'hanging committee' of the *British Medical Journal*. The study included a questionnaire to the authors of published articles and even more important a follow-up of the 1979 *Science citation index*.

An analysis of over 1500 articles received in this period is given and a fascinating flow chart is described looking not only at the 21% of articles which were accepted but more particularly at the process of rejection. Dr Lock found that the expert referees successfully recommended a significantly higher proportion of acceptances than either the Editor or one of his colleagues and that in all cases consensus among the various judges was higher than would have occurred by chance.

Dr Lock refers to what he calls the 'gold standard' of subsequent citation and thereby introduces a new yardstick of evaluation for all concerned with this subject.

His review of the literature is illuminating. The parallel between peer review of grant applications and the general thesis that the whole of the scientific community depends ultimately on peer review is obvious in retrospect but was not clear to me until I had read this book. Although this book will only have minority appeal, it is likely to be a lasting contribution to the literature and a helpful springboard for all those wishing to evaluate the editorial and grant award systems.

D.J.P.G.

Change and the ever increasing rate with which it occurs are characteristics of the age in which we live. Cumulated wisdom based on experience no longer seems so relevant: hence the need for a clear enunciation of the underlying principles of practice and the ways in which they apply in today's world. Much of current ethical debate appears to hinge on issues involving high technology (for example, when to switch off life-support machines) or major policy decisions (such as resource allocation in the provision of health services). Important though such issues are, less attention has been devoted to equally vital matters relating to the low-technology medicine and personal care so characteristic of general practice. It was with these considerations in mind that a family doctor (who died unexpectedly last year) and a philosopher collaborated to write *Ethical issues in family medicine*.

The authors chose a practical approach, starting with a working definition of family medicine. Using case-scenarios they teased out basic principles and values inherent in the doctor-patient relationship, such as 'supremacy of patient welfare', 'patient autonomy' and 'paternalism'. These and other issues are discussed in the wider context of the family, and the first half of the book ends with the various concepts brought together to form an ethic of family medicine.

The second half of the book is devoted to the application of such a code to case studies in which values conflict, patients

are 'difficult' and where referral to colleagues raises ethical problems.

Does this 'backwards' approach work? Is such an in-depth series of discussions too anecdotal to have wide applicability? Every general practitioner will recognize the sort of problems dealt with in the book, and, for the most part, it is written in a way which clinicians will readily understand. For these reasons alone this book is likely to have considerable appeal, and this will help the reader to come to grips with some of the more recondite philosophical and ethical concepts discussed.

The book is rooted in Canadian and American philosophies of primary care and British readers will be struck by the emphasis placed on family aspects of care. Possibly because of its transatlantic setting, moral and ethical implications of government's involvement in the provision of health care is underemphasized and more should have been said about confidentiality.

Despite these shortcomings, this is the most appropriate book on this subject available for general practitioners — especially those involved in undergraduate education and postgraduate training. This is more than a handbook of ethics for family doctors. The National Health Service general practitioner will be helped towards a clear appreciation of his role as he compares and contrasts his mode of practice with that of his Canadian counterpart, while non-general practitioner readers will be afforded considerable insight into the true nature of primary care.

J.D.E.K.

*The eye in general practice* first appeared in 1957. It has now been completely rewritten and is published in an eighth edition nearly 30 years later. I was surprised to discover that it is 10 years since the seventh edition was published and great strides have been made in ophthalmology in this time, particularly in the field of laser technology. Thus the book includes a new section on diabetic retinopathy, with emphasis on early recognition of vascular complication and the subsequent reduction in diabetic blindness.

Other eye problems are presented in a comprehensive and readable manner. An early chapter is devoted to common eye problems with reference to the subsequent chapters, where the eye diseases are arranged on an anatomical basis. Most of the photographs are superb, and the diagrams and tables excellent. The final chapters are devoted to visual standards for various occupations, screening of children for visual defects and definitions, benefits and useful addresses for the blind and partially sighted.

I have had a now well-worn copy of *The eye in general practice* on my bookshelf for many years, and have referred to it on many occasions. It was particularly useful when sitting the MRCGP examination — little time is given to the teaching of ophthalmology at either undergraduate or vocational training levels.

I am delighted to see this rewritten version, and will continue to recommend it as a worthwhile addition to any general practitioner's library.

T.R.D.

*Retinal detachment* is a clearly set out instruction manual on the diagnosis and management of retinal detachment. The author introduces the subject with concise definitions, classification and applied anatomy. This is followed by examination techniques, pathogenesis, prophylaxis and differential diagnosis. Chapters on preoperative considerations, surgical principles and techniques, early postoperative considerations and late postoperative considerations are also included.

This book is expertly illustrated with drawings and photographs which complement the easily understood text on

how to manage uncomplicated cases of retinal detachment with safety and efficiency.

*Retinal detachment* is intended primarily for trainee ophthalmologists and those ophthalmologists looking for an update in the subject. However, general practitioners would quickly understand the basic principles of this serious eye condition if they were to browse through this excellent manual.

R.J.R.

*Making the most of your doctor* is a light-hearted, family guide to dealing with the general practitioner. It aims to reduce the mystery and anxiety evoked by medical authority, while introducing the concept of sharing, communicative doctors. Readers are encouraged to ensure that their general practitioner is someone they can talk to and trust, who is accessible and medically sound. The wide variation in personality, style and mores of individual doctors is exposed, and the reader is reminded that he is free to choose the doctor to suit his needs.

Patients are encouraged to explore their own attitudes towards achieving good health care and practical tips ranging from listing questions for the family doctor before a consultation to taking a survival kit to ease a long wait in a hospital outpatient department are given. A checklist to assess the quality of care available from a new practice helps the reader to make an informed choice.

Preventive health care is stressed throughout the book, with emphasis on immunization, antenatal care and avoiding ischaemic heart disease. Although various screening procedures are recommended, general health checks offered by private companies are decried.

The final chapters provide informative accounts of sensitive issues such as confidentiality, access to records and complaints procedures.

Written by two social psychologists and one family doctor, this helpful little book is also valuable reading for medical students, general practitioner trainees and anyone practising medicine. It encourages critical appraisal of the acquired arrogance which may distance doctors from their patients.

In summary this is an excellent book for laymen who lack confidence or feel poorly informed about obtaining health care.

C.W.

## BOOKS RECEIVED

### THE ROLE OF PROSTAGLANDINS IN LABOUR

International Congress and Symposium Series, Number 92  
Clive Wood (Ed), Royal Society of Medicine, London, 1985.  
100 pages. Price £10.00

### EPILEPSY AND THE LAW — A MEDICAL SYMPOSIUM ON THE CURRENT LAW

International Congress and Symposium Series, Number 81  
Peter and Elizabeth Fenwick (Eds), Royal Society of Medicine, London, 1985. 88 pages. Price £9.00

### DISTANCE LEARNING IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

Avril Osborne, Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work, London, 1985. 151 pages. Price £5.00

### NHS MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVES FOR DOCTORS

King Edward's Hospital Fund for London, London, 1985.  
127 pages. Price £5.50

### A SYNOPSIS OF OCCUPATIONAL MEDICINE (2nd edition)

F.H. Tyrer and K. Lee, John Wright, Bristol, 1985. 227 pages.  
Price £12.50

### THE DIABETES REFERENCE BOOK

Peter Sonksen/Charles Fox and Sue Judd, Harper and Row, London, 1985. 283 pages. Price £4.95