

The cover looked good, and I expected to enjoy the chapter on general practice and to be informed and entertained by the others. However, this is not an easy book to read, and I was irritated by the sociological jargon and the way that the argument that women are marginalized in these professions because of their 'deviant gender status' is based on assertion and reference rather than data which I could assess for myself.

The chapter entitled 'Gender and general practice' is based on interviews with single-handed women general practitioners in Birmingham, where women make up only 8% of general practitioners but 20% of single-handed practitioners (nationally, the proportion of women general practitioners is 18%). The reasons these women gave for choosing to practice in this way included, predictably, previous personality or financial clashes in group practices, a desire for independence, and a praiseworthy enthusiasm for continuity of care. It is argued that this was somehow indicative of the 'ghettoism' women experience in group practice: a view I would be reluctant to accept without considering the opinions of men in single-handed practice, women in group practice, or the world outside Birmingham.

The final chapter on the position of professional women in India was a refreshing change, and for me the only enjoyable chapter in a book which I can only recommend as a source of copious references.

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## MEDICINE AND THE BIBLE

Bernard Palmer (Ed)  
*The Paternoster Press, Exeter (1986)*  
272 pages. Price £7.95

*Medicine and the Bible* is a book of nine essays, seven of which are written by medically qualified people. The topics covered are medicine in the Old Testament world and medicine in the New Testament world, followed by the Levitical code, leprosy and the Bible, the value of human life, homosexuality, demon possession, healing and conscience in 'modern medicine'.

Old Testament laws are shown to have had a profound impact on promoting healthy life-styles in the ancient world and Christianity to have had powerful influences over the development of western medicine and nursing practices. For these reasons the nine essays are of relevance to historians, moral philosophers, biblical scholars and any person in the caring professions who is concerned about the decisions they now face in daily clinical work. The authors have provided a well referenced book which applies biblical precepts to the confused social climate of the 1980s and they lead the reader in a systematic and logical way to link our ancient past to the most pressing moral and ethical issues of today.

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## PRACTICAL PSYCHIATRY OF OLD AGE

John Wattis and Michael Church  
*Croom Helm, London (1986)*  
195 pages. Price £8.95

This introductory text presents the subject of psychogeriatrics to 'intelligent people of all professions'. It describes multi-disciplinary team work, using a problem-oriented approach and is written by a psychiatrist and a clinical psychologist.

Although it is good to have a new introductory text for people entering the field, I have some reservations about the style

and presentation of the book. First, the two authors have not adequately described the tasks of other members of the multi-disciplinary team, such as social workers and occupational therapists. Secondly, the chapter on 'confusion', covering two of the principal syndromes of psychogeriatrics — delirium and dementia, is very scanty whereas a whole chapter has been devoted to the subject of hypochondriasis. Thirdly, although the problem-oriented approach and behavioural methods are well described, some of the other sections do not simplify complex subjects so successfully. For example, the section on depression is a little confusing, partly because the authors are trying to oversimplify complicated and inconclusive psychiatric research. Fourthly, although there are plenty of diagrams the authors have followed the trend of the times in relying excessively on flow charts.

Despite these reservations I would recommend the book as a good introduction to the subject. The problem-oriented approach is particularly appropriate to primary care management of elderly mentally ill patients and offers a much more positive style of working than has been employed in the past. If the balance of the book were a little better and some parts a little clearer, it would be first rate.

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## PSYCHIATRY IN MEDICAL PRACTICE

David Goldberg, Sidney Benjamin and Francis Creed  
*Tavistock Publications, London (1986)*  
322 pages. Price £12.95

*Psychiatry in medical practice* was written for medical students but would also be a worthwhile purchase for a health centre library. It is well presented, thoughtfully written and encourages the whole-person management of a patient rather than perpetuating the division between physical and psychological problems.

I particularly liked the chapters on interview techniques, worth reading for revision at any level of experience, and on aetiology, emphasizing the multifactorial nature in psychiatry. Health visitors may welcome the section on disorders peculiar to stages of the human life cycle.

It is difficult to criticize this book but I could not find any mention of the Court of Protection or of the enduring power of attorney. In addition, advice on the management of sleep disturbance without immediate recourse to hypnotic drugs seems to have been omitted and the index is not extensive perhaps because the book is designed to be read through.

It will not fit into a pocket but is not too heavy to be accommodated in a briefcase or large handbag. Only time will show whether the binding is strong enough to stand up to the frequent use this book deserves.

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## PARTNERS IN CARE

The consultation in general practice  
Peter G. Livesey  
William Heinemann, London (1986)  
128 pages. Price £7.50

*Partners in care* describes various aspects of the consultation in logical order, including chapters entitled Expectations,

Welcome, Listening with sympathy and finally Termination and conclusion.

The book is written in almost conversational style with a good deal of direct guidance from the author towards effective consulting skills and strategies. Although Dr Livesey explains in the introduction that he has deliberately reduced the number of references the style of writing and the lack of quoted evidence combine to give the reader the feeling of being patronized.

The title of the book demonstrates the philosophy of Dr Livesey's approach to the consultation. He describes well the various strategies which may lead to a more balanced and understanding relationship between doctor and patient. The few paragraphs about reassurance starting 'All too often reassurance lacks a firm footing...' are essential reading for all doctors, particularly those who frequently use the phrase in their notes 'patient reassured'.

This book would be useful for introducing some of the concepts of consultation to trainees who have difficulty with the heavier, more research-based works that are included in the excellent bibliography.

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## CLASS AND HEALTH

### Research and longitudinal data

Richard G. Wilkinson (Ed)

*Tavistock Publications, London (1986)*

223 pages. Price £20.00

*Class and health* attempts to indicate some of the key areas of research undertaken since the Black report on inequalities in health care and to examine the opportunities for further research. Nine well known authors from varied and distinguished backgrounds present an analysis of new data which confirms the basic soundness of many but not all of the controversial aspects of the Black report. Socioeconomic mortality gradients, social inequality, serious illness, unemployment and many other issues are addressed in a systematic and scholarly way culminating in a long chapter by Mildred Blaxter in which she painstakingly and helpfully reviews a series of British longitudinal studies.

Anyone with a serious interest in the relationship between inequality and health will find food for thought in this well referenced book.

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## EPIDEMIOLOGY AND HEALTH POLICY

### Contemporary issues in health, medicine and social policy

Sol Levine and Abraham Lilienfeld (Eds)

*Tavistock Publications, London (1987)*

301 pages. Price £12.95

The purpose of acquiring epidemiological knowledge is to use it when formulating and implementing health policy, but sadly this link is often of little interest to epidemiologists and health planners. *Epidemiology and health policy* is an unusual book which ventures beyond the immediate role of epidemiology in describing the distribution and causes of disease in populations and the effectiveness of alternative modes of medical care.

The theme of this book is that epidemiology is important for policy making, and this is explored by examining the contributions which epidemiology has made in the past and looking at the prospects for the future. Distinguished epidemiologists in the USA cover major issues of public health policy including nutrition, coronary heart disease, accidents and alcoholism. Each chapter has its own style, but there are common threads running through the book: the contribution of epidemiological knowledge must be considered in tandem with social, political and financial influences on policy; opinion makers, notably the media, must be more responsible in their use of information; health policies should give more emphasis to prevention and community involvement.

The difficulties in using epidemiological information are not ignored; the policy maker must cope with conflicting results emerging from similar studies, with disagreements on interpretation of data, and with a variety of evidence obtained from studies with different aims and perspectives. Such issues are discussed using many examples which, alas for the British reader, are mostly from the USA. However, this is a highly readable book which is not a technical text on epidemiology, and it should have wide appeal to those interested in public health policy.

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## THE GEOGRAPHY OF HEALTH SERVICES IN BRITAIN

Robin Hayes

*Croom Helm, London (1987)*

259 pages. Price £29.95

If a book is to be recommended it must be easy to read and understand. This book meets both these requirements. All general, specialist and community practitioners in the National Health Service should read it, but those with interests which are primarily clinical are likely to find it dull. For policy makers, academic or political, and practitioners interested in methods of delivering medical care it is essential reading.

Hayne's main message is that health care (more accurately, medical care) services are unevenly distributed. This is hardly news, but the book itemizes the inequalities and inequities in a clear and concise way. It also catalogues the largely ineffectual attempts to correct the situation by revenue allocation schemes.

Rural communities and inner cities are worst hit by the inequality and Hayne suggests that the independent contractor status of practitioners, which allows them to favour certain areas for their place of work, is partly responsible for this. However, he avoids the trap of oversimplification, realizing that diverse factors combine to reinforce an unsatisfactory situation. The deficient transport services in some rural areas is one example.

Some of his remedies are predictable, such as more home visits by general practitioners, but he recognizes that the health services do not operate in a vacuum and that revision of many other public services would be required to provide health workers with the optimum environment for efficiency.

This book has more than a whiff of party politics, but the bias does not affect the author's objective presentation of factual material. One may not agree with all that is in this book, but it deserves serious consideration.

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