

ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN DOCTORS AND PATIENTS*John D. Stoeckle (Ed)**MIT Press, London (1987)**440 pages. Price £34.95 (h/b), £17.50 (p/b)*

This book, edited by an American primary care physician, brings together some of the basic texts on doctor-patient interactions, especially ones from the USA. Those familiar with the applications of the social and behavioural sciences to medicine will recognize many old acquaintances among this collection. Included here are the classic papers by Talcott Parsons ('Illness and the role of the physician'), Irving Zola ('Problems of communication, diagnosis, and patient care'), Eliot Freidson ('Client control and medical practice') and Arthur Kleinman ('Explanatory models in health-care relationships' — this is an exploration of intrinsic differences in medical and lay perspectives on ill-health, from an anthropological viewpoint).

The book thus includes sociological, anthropological and psychological as well as clinical perspectives on the doctor-patient consultation. The only criticism one could level at this collection is that the proportion of 'old masters' is rather high — 12 out of the 17 papers were published before 1970, with the earliest published in 1927. Perhaps the most rewarding section is the editor's introduction — a comprehensive *tour de force* in which Dr Stoeckle effectively reviews much of the literature on the consultation, and brings many fresh insights to this subject. The introduction, occupying a quarter of the book, could stand as a monograph in its own right.

The book can be recommended for its collection of classic papers on an important theme, and for the opportunity it affords to compare primary care on both sides of the Atlantic.

CECIL G. HELMAN

*Honorary Research Fellow in Anthropology,
University College, London***PARTNERSHIP OR PREJUDICE****Communication between doctors and those in the other caring professions***John Walton and Gordon McLachlan (Eds)**Nuffield Provincial Hospitals Trust, London (1986)**85 pages*

This short book is edited by the President of the General Medical Council and the Secretary of the Nuffield Provincial Hospitals Trust. It is the third and final publication in a series of booklets about communication between doctors, and the people they have to deal with. *Partnership or prejudice* is a series of short essays which deals with communication between doctors and those in the other caring professions. Although the essays are written by doctors for doctors, eminent members of the other caring professions have been consulted. The professions concerned have been restricted to those who actually come into direct contact with patients.

The first essay is an introduction by the editors, and it describes how the work came about. In the second essay, Paul Freeling considers communication between doctors and nurses, both in the community and in hospitals. William Whimster deals with communication between doctors and hospital laboratory staff and Ian McColl writes on fostering good communication between doctors and secretaries, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and ward receptionists. Neil Kessel explores communication between doctors and social workers with his usual wit and clarity. Sir John Walton then provides a piece on communication between doctors and members of other selected caring professions: dietitians, clinical psychologists, pharmacists and medical physicists.

The editors make it clear that, in a book of this nature, it is natural to focus on the shortcomings of doctors and the dif-

iculties that arise. However, they are careful to point out that on countless occasions communication can be highly successful.

N.C.H. STOTT

*Professor of General Practice,
University of Wales College of Medicine***CLINICAL MEDICINE***Parveen J. Kumar and Michael L. Clark (Eds)**Bailliere Tindall, London (1987)**1011 pages. Price £17.50*

The virtues and problems of this well written book are summarized in the preface where the editors refer to the 'detail and background required for medical practice in the late 1980s' and to the 'vast quantity of established fact required by today's student'.

With 20 contributors this volume presents the usual difficulties of multi-author texts but these have been mitigated by skilled editing and by the fact that all the authors were at St Bartholomew's hospital at the time of writing. This, then, is the Bart's textbook of medicine — a smaller and much cheaper tome than its acclaimed rival from Oxford.

I have lived with this book for four weeks and find it most useful for such things as explaining specialized cardiac investigations, and reminding me of the malarial life cycle and the rationale of prophylactic therapy for holidaymakers. On the other hand it was very little help when I had difficulties in management, such as in manipulating antianginal and anti-convulsant drugs or in so called 'functional bowel disease' — one page is given to this last which is said to make up 60–80% of patients in a gastroenterology clinic.

One might conclude that this book is more suited to medical students coming up to finals, but I am also worried by the emphasis on facts which tend to overwhelm concepts and principles of management.

Overall, then, this book is a mine of clearly presented information, and it covers a lot of ground. It is almost certain to throw a little light on the most diverse medical problems. Yet I wonder whether the sort of compromise inherent in a book of this kind do not seriously limit its use as a clinical companion.

G.K. FREEMAN

*Senior Lecturer in Primary Medical Care,
University of Southampton***EMPLOYING STAFF (2nd edition)***Norman Ellis**British Medical Association, London (1987)**121 pages. Price £5.00*

Whether the general practitioner employs one member of staff or 40, he is an employer and, like it or not, he cannot ignore the fact. With the complexity of today's employment legislation, general practitioners understandably find this a sobering thought.

Norman Ellis's book is an absolute gift. Succinctly put together, easily read, it is a step-by-step guide, taking the reader through the whole spectrum from what could be termed straightforward employment issues to the potentially worrying aspects of discipline and dismissal. An added bonus is that *Employing staff* has been written particularly for general practice staff.

This is an essential book for general practitioners, trainee general practitioners and practice managers. No practice in the country should be without it.

MERRILL WHALEN

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