

ALCOHOLISM: INSIGHT INTO THE ADDICTIVE MIND*Clive Graymore**David and Charles, London (1987)**140 pages. Price £5.95*

It is always interesting to read an account of illness and recovery by one who has suffered and this book is no exception. It is a chronicle from one of the tiny minority of problem drinkers who are truly dependent; the tone is subjective, anecdotal and evangelistic throughout. It may help some, but I do not think that it offers much 'insight into the addictive mind'. Tribute is paid especially to Alcoholics Anonymous, and to the Minnesota method of psychotherapy.

There are many people who benefit from the Alcoholics Anonymous approach, and an understanding of the many reasons why some people appear to be more susceptible than others to dependence, whether psychological or chemical or both, must clearly take account of the low self-esteem which is often a key. A better knowledge of the way this and other factors interact in some of those at risk is needed, but this book does not supply it. Confusion remains. Is the 'alcoholic' genetically different from the rest of us? Probably not.

The author admits this in his postscript, which is an honest statement of his own beliefs in a much clearer and more logical form than the rest of the book.

JOHN BENNISON

*General Practitioner, Hatfield Broad Oak, Essex***LET'S DRINK TO YOUR HEALTH!****A self help guide to sensible drinking***I. Robertson and N. Heather**British Psychological Society, Herts (1986)**154 pages. Price £3.95*

Let's drink to your health! is an attractively presented and well-written self-help guide for people who want to drink less alcohol, rather than those who are physically dependent. Readers are encouraged to participate actively by completing self-assessment charts and questionnaires to help identify reasons for drinking and times of the day which are more risky than others for high alcohol intake. The final section of the book is a diary which enables the reader to monitor his or her own drinking for 12 weeks. The authors have considerable experience in evaluating the ways of helping heavy drinkers to cut down and their approach to the problem is clear and consistent. General practitioners can recommend this book with confidence to patients who need to reduce but not give up their drinking.

E.G. BUCKLEY

*Editor of the Journal***WOMEN, DRINKING AND PREGNANCY***Moira Plant**Tavistock, London (1987)**168 pages. Price £16.00 h/b, £8.95 p/b*

In *Women, drinking and pregnancy* Moira Plant presents a comprehensive and critical review of the evidence for the fetal alcohol syndrome and gives a detailed account of her study of the drinking habits and outcome of pregnancy in over 1000 'normal' women, most of whom were moderate drinkers. The results showed that birth abnormalities were slightly associated with but not caused by maternal alcohol consumption and therefore did not support the claims of earlier studies that moderate alcohol consumption in pregnancy is harmful to the fetus. She concludes that the main predictors of fetal abnormalities are

still the use of tobacco and illegal drugs and that health professionals should be kept informed about developments in the research field in order to avoid making alarmist statements about moderate drinking in pregnancy. This is an extremely valuable up-to-date account of present knowledge of the risks of alcohol in pregnancy and would be useful reading for any health professionals involved in prenatal counselling or antenatal care.

AGNES MCKNIGHT

*Senior Lecturer, Department of General Practice,
Queen's University of Belfast***HEALTHY PUBLIC POLICY: A ROLE FOR THE HEA***King's Fund Institute**King's Fund Institute, London (1987)**15 pages. Price £2.00*

The King's Fund Institute have published this monograph as a briefing paper for the new Health Education Authority which takes over from the Health Education Council in England. The panel of authors, chaired by John Crofton, propose that the Health Education Authority should address itself to the broad spectrum of health promotion rather than the narrower confines of health education. They also suggest that its activities must reach far beyond the NHS and call on the authority to develop a coordinated national 'health policy', in line with the World Health Organization's strategy 'Health for all'. Primary care receives a brief mention, principally in respect of preventive services, although primary health care workers could play a wider role in health promotion by working across traditional boundaries with local community groups.

There has been a strong public health tradition in the UK, which in recent times appears to have lost ground, although a number of other countries in the Western world have continued to place great emphasis on such activity. The new Health Education Authority must address itself to the issues discussed within this paper and have the courage to make clear statements about policies for health promotion in England, and work with the sister authorities for the other countries towards a health promotion policy for the UK.

SIMON SMAIL

*Senior Lecturer in General Practice, Cardiff;
Chairman, Welsh Health Promotion Authority***A BASIC FORMULARY FOR GENERAL PRACTICE****Practical guides for general practice 2***G.B. Grant, D.A. Gregory and T.D. Van Zwanenberg**Oxford University Press (1987)**71 pages. Price £2.95*

This formulary for general practitioners is a list of 150 drugs together with some detail of dosage and cost and is based on a simple disease index. There are notes after each section giving simple therapeutic advice, and some common side-effects, interactions and other warnings. Drugs are identified by their approved (generic) names only, apart from a few proprietary combination preparations.

The important word in the title is 'basic' as the list of drugs can only be intended to cover those drugs described as 'first line'. There are few alternatives, which is restrictive in the general practice setting, and makes the book less appealing to established principals. I could not understand why drugs used only in emergencies should have been excluded, for example drugs used in the treatment of convulsions in infancy. It is not surprising that a document from an academic department should use only