

**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

the approved names of drugs, although the arguments for and against their use are not settled yet.

Many principals in general practice are auditing their prescribing by producing practice formularies with their partners. They may find it interesting to compare their lists with this one, but they should remember that the list is basic.

J.D. GILLEGHAN

*Prescribing Fellow, Scottish Council of the RCGP*

### CHILDHOOD ASTHMA: DIAGNOSIS, TREATMENT AND MANAGEMENT

*Tony Milner*

*Martin Dunitz, London (1987)*

*147 pages. Price £29.95*

This book provides a comprehensive review of childhood asthma with 11 chapters by Professor Milner and one chapter from a general practitioner. It is nicely presented and illustrated and covers the field in a readable and concise fashion. There is a useful summary at the end of each chapter to underline important points. The author gives an overview of alternative remedies used in asthma and manages to keep an open mind on many of the non-medical approaches to the condition which seem so popular with asthmatic patients and their parents.

There are a few criticisms. The treatment of childhood asthma is rapidly advancing and already some of the book is out of date. For example, the chapter on acute asthma does not stress the crucial role of early use of oral steroids in acute attacks. I suspect the majority of general practitioners will find the book too long and detailed; there are 13 pages on respiratory function tests alone. The chapter on general practice, however, is excellent value and Dr Jenkinson is to be congratulated for condensing so many interesting ideas into one chapter.

Any doctor who is looking for a comprehensive and readable guide to childhood asthma will enjoy reading this book.

PETER BARRITT

*General Practitioner, Shrewsbury*

### PRESCRIBING IN PREGNANCY

*Peter C. Rubin (Ed)*

*British Medical Journal, London (1987)*

*126 pages. Price £5.95*

This slim volume of reprinted articles from the *British Medical Journal* is written by specialists for specialists. Most of the chapters are devoted to conditions such as endocrine disorders, cardiovascular disease, thromboembolic disease and rheumatic diseases which require specialist supervision during pregnancy. Even the chapter on treatment of common minor ailments, again by a specialist, discusses rarely used drugs such as metoclopramide, cimetidine, sucralfate and carbenoxolone when considering heartburn and dyspepsia.

The evidence is that both general practitioners and their pregnant patients are aware of the problems of prescribing during pregnancy and have modified their behaviour by sticking to tried and tested remedies. When problems arise the relevant sections in the *British national formulary* on prescribing in pregnancy and during breast feeding provide helpful succinct advice. The only use which this book might serve is in preconception counselling of women who are on long-term medication such as lithium, anticonvulsants or corticosteroids, but this is probably more usefully done by direct liaison between the general practitioner, the local obstetric services and the relevant specialist.

C.K. DRINKWATER

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### INFERTILITY: A GUIDE FOR THE ANXIOUS COUPLE

*Mary Anderson*

*Faber and Faber, London (1987)*

*93 pages. Price £3.95*

It would be surprising indeed if this book relieved couples of anxiety about their fertility. Its text is littered with medical and technical terms which make understanding the subject impossible for most readers.

More important, however, are the glaring omissions and confused delivery of important information. The book contains most of the facts about reproduction and infertility but fails to give any indication to readers of the importance of various conditions nor the relative success and failure of certain treatments. For example, the need to keep sperm samples at body temperature is not stressed (though analysis 'as soon as possible' is recommended), the use of a special fertility thermometer, available on prescription, is overlooked and so too are many other small but significant details. There is no mention of the national self-help organizations and a further reading section is limited to one author (two books).

The emotional aspects of infertility are not covered. The importance of approaching the problems of fertility as a couple is mentioned but the structure of the book and titles of the chapters undermine this very precept.

The book cannot be recommended in its present form.

CLIVE FROGGATT

*General Practitioner, Cheltenham*

### NEUROMUSCULAR DISEASES

*Jaap Bethlem and Charlotte E. Knobbout*

*Oxford University Press (1987)*

*158 pages. Price £9.95*

Contemporary writing on neuromuscular disease is either spread through specialist journals or concentrated in heavy tomes. Now a physiotherapist and a neurologist have teamed up to write a primer in paperback form.

Neuromuscular diseases are still by and large chronic and incurable. It is refreshing to find a neurological text which considers the emotional response to this. For example, 'The final phase of ALS [amyotrophic lateral sclerosis] is agonising both for the patient and for those close to him' and later 'feelings of fear, uncertainty and powerlessness on the part of the doctor in charge are often the reason why he tends to invite his patient for a check-up less and less...'. Only through sharing these reactions will we improve our ability to manage chronic disease.

At a factual level the authors provide an excellent discussion of differential diagnosis, investigation and what is known about the pathophysiology. The initial diagnosis of neuromuscular diseases, like skin conditions, depends more on pattern recognition than on words. The authors sensibly intersperse their descriptions with ample photographs. At the end of each chapter they sum up with a wise and witty caption, for example on Duchenne's dystrophy, 'The best way to diagnose the disease is to listen carefully to the mother'.

Peripheral nervous disease is comparatively rare and within each neurological centre the diagnosis of neuromuscular disease is usually in the hands of one sub-specialist. Consequently, even other neurologists and paediatricians are at a distance and for them and their trainees this book admirably summarizes the state of the art. It could also be recommended for the district general hospital library where general practitioners with an interest can refer to it.

LEONE RIDSDALE

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