

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.

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### 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 The treatment of childhood asthma is rapidly advancing and already some of the book is out of date.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.

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### 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.

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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.

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### 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.

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