



BOOK AND VIDEO REVIEW

THE HEALERS. A HISTORY OF MEDICINE IN SCOTLAND

David Hamilton

Canongate, Edinburgh (paperback edition, 1987)
318 pages. Price £5.95

David Hamilton is a transplant surgeon and, in his other role as medical historian, the Director of the Wellcome Unit for the History of Medicine at Glasgow. Much of his recent historical work has been concerned with the history of transplant surgery, but his first major contribution to the history of medicine was this book, originally published in 1981 and now available in a paperback edition.

Hamilton covers a very wide period from the 'dark ages' to the twentieth century, but the greatest strength of the book is in chapters four to six which deal with the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Until the mid-nineteenth century, Scottish medicine was supreme and medical education in the only two English universities of Oxford and Cambridge was moribund. Edinburgh and Glasgow (but not St Andrew's and Aberdeen from both of which you could buy a degree through the post) provided a broad and excellent medical education. The roots of this excellence were at Leyden in the Netherlands, where the emphasis was on bedside clinical instruction. This stood in stark contrast to the reliance on ancient authorities which characterized such English medical education as existed. It was the teaching and lively excitement of Scottish medicine which attracted the cream of medical students to Scotland; and the production of graduates and original research was phenomenal. Students flocked to Scotland from England, North America and Europe. The number who obtained a formal qualification such as the Edinburgh MD is impressive enough: between 1750 and 1850 Oxford and Cambridge produced just over 500 medical graduates while Scotland produced over 11 000. And an unknown number, possibly as many as those who graduated, visited the Scottish medical schools for periods of a few months to a year, attended lectures and demonstrations, and then returned to their practices, but without any formal qualification.

In England it was the growth of the London and provincial university medical schools from the mid-nineteenth century which finally challenged the pre-eminent position of Edinburgh and Glasgow. Only later did Oxbridge medicine achieve a respectable level. All this and much more about Scottish medicine is told very well indeed in this excellent account, which cannot fail to interest practitioners and others who have an interest in the history of medicine. This new paperback edition deserves to be a great success.

IRVINE LOUDON

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RHEUMATOLOGY FOR GENERAL PRACTITIONERS

H.L.F. Currey and Sally Hull

Oxford University Press (1987)
259 pages. Price £15.00

This excellent blend of the experience of a consultant and a general practitioner on the teaching staff of the London Hospital adequately covers the whole field of rheumatology as seen in general practice. Emphasis is placed on continuity of care by one doctor and there are many helpful figures, tables and case histories.

Unfortunately, Sally Hull has a relatively short experience of handling these conditions as they present in her general practice and the book is therefore biased towards hospital oriented treatment. For example, the acute flare-up of an arthritic knee usually settles rapidly with strict rest and pain relief: intra-articular steroids are rarely necessary. Uninfected olecranon bursitis usually settles when strictly rested — if this fails, simple aspiration is all that is needed. Severe acute capsulitis usually responds to rest in less than 18 months: anti-inflammatory drugs may help and if these fail it responds rapidly to systemic steroids. The book also fails to mention that manipulation is used successfully by many general practitioners. All doctors should teach quadriceps drill personally: static contractions, straight-leg raising and active contractions against resistance soon give measurable results if performed several times daily.

Despite these criticisms this up-to-date book will make a valuable addition to every group practice library.

DENIS CRADDOCK

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PSYCHIATRIC EMERGENCIES IN FAMILY PRACTICE

John D. Pollitt (Ed)

MTP Press, Lancaster (1987)
234 pages. Price £19.95

My mistake on receiving this book was to read it chapter by chapter. Where were the emergencies? Buried among the background information on psychiatric disorders.

The book aims to provide a quick reference for the general practitioner responding to a psychiatric emergency and it is helpful to find the chapters based on presenting problems rather than diagnosis. However, 'emergency' is not defined, and perspectives on that differ.

Often it is the time, place and effect on others of a person's disordered behaviour, as much as the nature of that behaviour, which constitutes the emergency and causes greatest difficulty in general practice: for example, the Friday afternoon call from a neighbour about the elderly lady who has wandered off in her nightie and for whom 'something must be done, Doctor'; or the