



CLINICAL METHOD — A GENERAL PRACTICE APPROACH

Robin C. Fraser
Butterworths, Guildford (1987)
 87 pages. Price £6.95

This little book tackles a large subject under a rather grandiose title. It has a foreword by Marshall Marinker, who held the Foundation Chair in Community Health at the University of Leicester, and a preface as well as several chapters by Robin Fraser, at present Leicester's Professor of General Practice. This arrangement seems to describe the blood-line of the book — by undergraduate experience out of *The future general practitioner*. This is not a bad pedigree and has produced quite a workmanlike progeny; a book which will be informative to any service general practitioner considering taking medical students in his practice.

The authors, all from the Department of General Practice at Leicester, had the immediate aim of helping students 'to gain maximum benefit from a period of exposure to, and teaching in, the setting of general practice as part of their basic medical education'. I am sure that for students in the Leicester curriculum they achieve this aim well even if some of their content seems to me otiose. A statement such as '... if a deep-seated personality disorder is identified, the patient must be referred to a specialist psychotherapist' does not seem likely to add much to a student's understanding of clinical method.

The use of the student handouts from one medical school as a textbook suitable for courses at another may well be one milestone in the development of an academic subject. The fault may be in me or in general practice but, despite its pedigree, this book does not mark that milestone.

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THE TRUTH ABOUT AIDS

Patrick Dixon
Kingsway Publications, Eastbourne (1987)
 251 pages. Price £4.95

My initial reaction to this book was: 'not another paperback about AIDS'. However, this is a useful and interesting book that patients will read and benefit from.

Patrick Dixon's background is as a member of a terminal care team in London and as a church leader. The book reflects and benefits from both of these experiences. The contents can be divided into three main areas: facts about AIDS, the Christian response, and the role of hospices in terminal care. The facts are well organized and the book is easy to read. There are particularly good chapters on the reliability of condoms and what the role of the government and the church in the AIDS crisis

should be. The author also tackles the thorny question of whether AIDS is the 'wrath of God', with a clarity and sensitivity that other church leaders could learn from.

My only disappointment with this book lies in its discussion of the role of the general practitioner. The author reiterates the stereotype of the unsympathetic general practitioner who cannot be trusted with confidential information, and there is too little emphasis on the need to develop primary care services for those people who wish to die at home.

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SUICIDE

Clinical and epidemiological studies
Brian Barraclough with Jennifer Hughes
Croom Helm, London (1987)
 188 pages. Price £22.50

The objective of this publication is to improve knowledge about the possibilities of preventing suicide. The studies demonstrate the importance of mental illness, social isolation and social distress in the aetiology of suicide and quantify these aspects which have had anecdotal support from practising family doctors for many years.

This being so, few general practitioners are likely to find this book of any great practical value. However, for those with trainees who wish to see the facts for themselves and reach their own conclusions the book does show how scientific methods of systematic observation and hypothesis testing can be applied to phenomena related to suicide and in turn how such application can lead to a quantification of the importance of the various aetiological factors.

Finally, by scrutinizing the evidence for the success of lay efforts to prevent suicide by counselling the high risk person, the author shows that little effect on outcome is achieved. This is sad news for organizations such as the Samaritans but emphasizes the importance of the prevention and treatment of mental illness in primary care.

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BIRTHPLACE

Report of the confidential enquiry into facilities available at the place of birth conducted by the National Birthday Trust
G. Chamberlain and P. Gunn
John Wiley, Chichester (1987)
 291 pages. Price £29.50

This volume is the fourth of a series commissioned by the National Birthday Trust, the best known of its forerunners being