

HEALTH AND DEPRIVATION**Inequality and the north**

*Peter Townsend, P. Phillimore and A. Beattie
Croom Helm, Kent (1987)
211 pages. Price £19.95 h/b; £8.95 p/b*

This book strengthens further the evidence for an association between social deprivation and ill health. The authors determined indices of deprivation (unemployment, ownership of cars and houses, domestic overcrowding) and of health (standardized mortality ratios for ages 0–64 years and rates of permanent sickness and disability and of low birth weight) for 678 local authority wards in the north of England. The raw data are given in an appendix, but the strength of the association can be seen by a glance at the figure on page 109.

An association between two variables may be due to chance; to interdependence; or to a causal relationship, with one variable being dependent on the other. The authors argue strongly, and for me convincingly, that the association is predominately one of dependence, with deprivation leading to ill health — a view which is scarcely in conflict with common sense. Accepting the authors' diagnosis does not, however, entail acceptance of their prescription, which is to substitute the 'social model' of health care for the 'medical model'. We have, in fact, not only to promote health, but also to relieve sickness.

DOUGLAS BLACK

Chairman of DHSS Working Group on Inequalities in Health, 1977–80

DRUG USE AND MISUSE

*T. Heller, M. Gott and C. Jeffery (Eds)
John Wiley, Chichester (1987)
199 pages. Price £9.50*

This book should be compulsory reading for all health professionals. Using a sociological approach it discusses the unprecedented rise in drug abuse in all areas of society in recent years. The acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) epidemic is a linked problem which adds urgency to the need to understand and minimize drug abuse.

The book acknowledges the increased availability of drugs as a major factor in the rise in drug abuse and poses the question, 'Why do only a minority of the population who experiment with drugs develop an addiction?' It is suggested that for some individuals membership of a deviant group may provide a sense of purpose and identify, and that this may be particularly true in areas of socioeconomic deprivation. The historical failure of legislation to control addiction is described — neither prohibition nor legal controls have been successful in preventing alcohol abuse. Most readers will find themselves on familiar ground in the well written chapters on alcohol and benzodiazepines. The phases of addiction and the role of gender in attitudes to drug usage are considered and a range of options to drug therapy are discussed, emphasizing the role of counselling and education.

The most depressing chapter in the book reviews the attitudes of general practitioners to drug misuse and their apparent reluctance to become involved with drug abusers. Doctors have been able to ignore the problem until now, but with the advent of AIDS this cannot continue.

ALAN GILMAN

General Practitioner, Stockport

URINARY TRACT INFECTIONS

*D. Brooks (ed)
MTP Press, Lancaster (1987)
148 pages. Price £16.50*

There are five chapters in this book which, with a little effort, may be read at a single sitting. As the series title suggests, a number of practical and useful points about urinary tract infection are made by way of easy to read summary statements at the end of each chapter. These are anticipated in a list of practical questions in the preface. These short lists alone make this book worthy of a place in the library of my training practice.

It is easy to pick out the two chapters written by general practitioners: chapter one is a useful overview containing some important definitions and chapter two, which concerns women with urinary tract infections, is full of sensible pragmatic advice. This is in stark contrast to the last chapter dealing with old people which is largely daft and also badly written. Between these two extremes I found the chapter on male urinary tract infection informative, and the one dealing with children important, if sometimes a little impractical — for example 'Any child of any age with a fever in whom there is not a clear cut diagnosis must have a urine culture taken'.

Geriatrics excepted, I enjoyed this book.

JEREMY BROWN

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A PICTURE OF HEALTH

*Constance Hardy
Heatherbank Press, Glasgow (1987)
204 pages. Price £4.95*

Is this a 'picture of health' — or is it, rather, a picture of life in Edinburgh, seen through the eyes of one who has belonged to the city since birth, but can stand back to describe with gentle irony the comic inconsistencies, pretensions and small hypocrisies of a capital with a reputation for taking itself seriously? They are also eyes for detail — for instance, on dinner parties: 'In the Georgian houses the dining rooms had low panell'd skirtings which contained a concealed cupboard lined with zinc. This was to house the chamberpot when gentlemen were drinking together. Our family sideboard had one too and I was always told that it was for leaking wine bottles, which was fairly accurate, I suppose.' And of the people who went to the dinner parties: 'All those professional gentlemen [of the law] had their uniforms ... with neatly rolled umbrellas, they walked in penguin pairs up the hill discoursing in their own peculiar phrases in what was recognizably a refined legal voice. The words "may clayant" often floated back as they passed. The medicals used the same formality, only their hats were large black Homburgs and the older generation were said to carry a catheter inside the lining band ... Status was as essential to these gentlemen as Virtue to their ladies. Of course, no doctor was ever seen without his Black Bag: when he was high enough up the medical tree, an assistant carried it for him.'

But there is more to this book than vignettes and anecdotes. It is a story of changing times, of poverty and illness seldom seen today and of an even more demanding life for doctors and nurses.

So who is Constance Hardy? Clearly a doctor and a doctor's wife. There will be many readers of this *Journal* — not all in Scotland — who will think they have met someone very like her and even recognize her voice.

JOHN HORDER

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