

AN INTRODUCTION TO ACUPUNCTURE**A practical guide for GPs and other medical personnel***Peter Pearson**MTP Press, Lancaster (1987)**89 pages. Price £14.95*

For the past few years my patients have been telling me about the value of acupuncture, but I had never been stimulated into studying the subject.

When this small book arrived on my desk it seemed to be the right moment to take a closer look. It is beautifully written, illustrated and produced, and I enjoyed every word of it.

The author sets out to introduce acupuncture to busy general practitioners as a practical proposition. Only the basic essentials of the Chinese systems are outlined. The meridians and their meanings are explained, the acupuncture points detailed and the techniques for needling shown.

The types of complaint treated seemed to be those like backache, where a high placebo response might be expected. The scientific background to acupuncture is only briefly discussed; nevertheless, this is an excellent introductory book. It will encourage many doctors to give this form of alternative therapy a trial.

MARTIN BARKER

*General Practitioner, Stamford, Lincolnshire***DOMICILIARY TERMINAL CARE***Derek Doyle**Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh (1987)**130 pages. Price £6.95*

The author of this short book on domiciliary terminal care succeeds admirably in meeting the disparate needs of medical and nursing colleagues, and indeed other health professionals, who are called upon to care for the terminally ill at home. It is written with sensitivity and its pragmatic approach reflects the background of the author in both hospice and general practice.

The principles of pain and symptom control, including the effective use of opiates and adjuvant drugs, sedatives and steroids are defined expertly and concisely. The key chapters thereafter provide an *aide-mémoire* on the management of emergencies, choice of diet and appliances, hints on communication and ways of improving doctor–nurse cooperation to raise professional standards. The author has the courage to expose deficiencies of liaison and communication intraprofessionally in the primary care team and externally between the general practitioner and hospital and hospice colleagues. In the last two chapters clear guidelines are provided for doctor and nurse to meet the spiritual needs of their patients and to provide bereavement support, through better understanding of pathological grief and the need for counselling.

In summary this is a most useful handbook, which offers sensible guidance for general practitioners, their trainees and nursing colleagues involved in terminal care. I believe it will also be valuable as a reference source to introduce students in medicine and nursing to domiciliary terminal care.

W.G. IRWIN

*Head of the Department of General Practice,
Queen's University, Belfast***DEALING WITH MEDICAL MALPRACTICE****The British and Swedish experience***Marilynn M. Rosenthal**Tavistock, London (1987)**270 pages. Price £29.95*

I waded through this densely written book over a weekend. It is written from an American viewpoint and describes the un-

satisfactory mechanisms for regulating medical professional competence in the USA and presents an interesting socio-historical survey of evolving medical professionalism. When it comes to the analysis of the British and Swedish systems, however, Dr Rosenthal's study of the British system seems barely adequate. In particular, she does not seem to have real knowledge of family practitioner committee work or disciplining of hospital doctors (who seldom appear before the General Medical Council). I suspect her observations on the Swedish regulatory body were also limited and perhaps affected by language barriers.

The suggestion that the two organizations have constant workloads because they cannot cope with more is unsubstantiated. Careful screening of cases is a more likely explanation. The Swedish systematic comprehensive no-fault system with its valuable feedback of information is well recommended. The tort system — scourge of American medicine and burgeoning in England — is exposed as inadequate.

The book is complicated and contains a distillation of enormous amounts of work by other sociologists as well as Dr Rosenthal's own efforts. She has painstakingly knitted this together, but her objectivity is suspect — flashes of hostility towards the medical profession keep showing through. 'It is clear that the British public is no longer content' is often repeated, but where is 'the overwhelming evidence'?

Nevertheless, the book is timely and topical and worth reading for some of the facts revealed.

J.C. CUMMINS

*General Practitioner, Havant, Hampshire***WHILE I'M HERE DOCTOR****A study of the doctor patient relationship***Andrew Elder and Oliver Samuel (eds)**Associated Book Publishers (UK), Andover (1987)**127 pages. Price £7.95*

While I'm here doctor is a fascinating book which is likely to become one of the standard texts for general practice trainees. It is written by several general practitioners, all sharing a background in Balint seminars, who discuss the complex nature of doctor–patient relationships. By concerning itself with the processes of normal consultations rather than the 'long interview' model of traditional psychotherapeutic work in general practice, the book is in some senses a sequel to *Six minutes for the patient*. In his introduction Dr Jack Norrell criticizes the short-term nature of most studies of the consultation and argues the need for studies which concentrate on outcome in the long journey which patients and general practitioners travel together.

Each chapter is based on three or four case studies which stimulate one to turn continually to the appendix where the up-to-date circumstances of the patients are described. The book is particularly useful in separating the interaction between doctors and patients from the traditional passive concept of counselling. Several of the authors describe with great honesty the shift from contempt through to a new understanding of the patient as a unique individual worthy of interest and attention.

This is a book which cannot fail to interest general practitioners. It is a powerful plea for us to become more sensitive to the long-term needs of our patients. It is also an enjoyable read — on a long train journey I read it from cover to cover in preference to an excellent 'who dunnit'.

E. GRAHAM BUCKLEY

Editor of the Journal