



INFORMATION HANDLING IN GENERAL PRACTICE

Richard Westcott and R.V.H. Jones (eds)
Croom Helm, London (1988)
289 pages. Price £12.95

The rate of change in general practice computing is rapid and this book provides an up-to-date summary of many of the exciting things that are happening. There are chapters from most of the people involved in the field and from others outside, such as Tim de Dombal who specializes in the computerized diagnosis of abdominal pain and Allan Maryon-Davis from the Health Education Authority. There are chapters on the historical development, what is going on now and pipe dreams for the future. Anyone interested in information technology as applied to general practice would do well to read this book which is well supplied with references for further reading. The chapters have been well chosen to cover most of the field and there is surprisingly little overlap.

I would have liked there to have been chapters which took an even broader view. For example, the use of computers in looking at the relationship between social factors and health both on a geographical basis and for the individual patient. I would also have liked a little more practical detail in the areas where there are considerable developments taking place at the moment, such as the 'no cost' options for general practitioners, the problems of developing classification systems, the need to develop guidelines for the extraction of data by organizations outside the practice, and the implications of the computerization of general practice registration data on one central computer which has now become a practical possibility. There are also potential dangers from the introduction of computers into general practice which are not highlighted. The book gives an example of a computerized repeat medication for capsules of flurazepam 30 mg to be given in lots of 28 with 23 repeat prescriptions being authorized. The patient being given this would be dependent on benzodiazepines before the time for review of her repeat medication.

Overall, however, this is an excellent book which would prove extremely useful for someone interested in this subject.

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PROBLEMS OF PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN

Naomi Richman and Richard Lansdown (eds)
John Wiley, Chichester (1988)
243 pages. Price £7.95

One aspect of child health in which there appears to have been few advances is the management of behavioural disorders in children. This is probably because it is not a fashionable subject and attracts little money for research, yet it may be fundamental to the future of young children. The editors of this book are to be congratulated on tackling a wide range of pre-

school problems in an eminently readable style which will appeal to both health professionals and parents.

With 14 chapters there are contributions from a variety of backgrounds, yet the underlying themes are consistently maintained. These themes stress the importance of adaptability and change, with the interaction between children and their environment being continually stressed. The contents focus largely on relationships, communication and behaviour disorders, and a sensitive and sensible chapter on judicial procedures is particularly relevant to those who are closely involved with family problems relating to children.

Despite the fact that general practitioners can spend up to a quarter of their time with young children, our understanding of how best to advise parents is often limited and based on anecdote and personal experience. Here is an opportunity to sharpen up on many of the problems which face parents who consult us about their children's growth, development and behaviour.

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THE AGEING POPULATION — BURDEN OR CHALLENGE?

Nicholas Wells and Charles Freer (eds)
Macmillan Press, Basingstoke (1988)
279 pages. Price £35.00 (h/b), £13.95 (p/b)

Professor Tom Arie in his foreword sounds enthusiastic 'I have learnt something new from, or been stimulated by, virtually every chapter'. Despite this, I started to read the book with some scepticism about multi-author efforts in this field. However, I agree that this is an excellent volume, full of varied information which would be hard for the individual to find on his own. The editors are Nicolas Wells from the Office of Health Economics and Charles Freer. We have become accustomed to the excellent and authoritative reports from Mr Wells's organization and Dr Freer is known as a member of that rare breed of general practitioners who have understood the challenge and satisfaction in primary care of the elderly. They have selected an outstanding group of contributors and have welded their efforts into a most readable and informative book.

The first section is an account of the ageing population in terms of demography, longevity, morbidity and dependency. Chapter three by Ken Wright is particularly interesting to a medical reader as it deals with economic aspects. He describes a 'house rich, cash poor' generation of old people, the biggest shift in heritable wealth this century. Perusal of this chapter will help readers to understand the dilemmas now facing government ministers as they examine problems of funding services.

Section two is concerned with providing for the elderly, and again the views of experts from health, social services and the voluntary sector are clearly and provocatively laid out. The Kent experiment is well described by Challis and Davies who were