



MEDICINE AND CULTURE

Notions of health and sickness in Britain, the US, France and West Germany

Lynn Payer

Victor Gollancz, London (1989)

204 pages. Price £12.95

The science of medicine is the same all over the world but the art of medicine — that is, a doctor's quality of care — is different as it is influenced by cultural customs, ethnic characteristics and religious beliefs. Lynn Payer is an American journalist with an English mother and a French father and, I suspect, a German grandparent. She provides a vivid, objective synthesis of statistics, critical observations and lively anecdotes about the four countries. Called the free world, the countries have much in common but quite different cultures, views of the human condition, concepts of health and disease, and approaches to medical practice.

While doctors within a given country differ, doctors from different countries differ even more. For example, the author points out that the diagnosis of a patient with vague digestive symptoms, but whose investigations exclude an organic disease, will be strongly influenced by culture: an American specialist will diagnose food allergy; a British clinician will call it a virus infection; a French physician will interpret it as a liver crisis; and a West German doctor will label it as cardiac insufficiency.

This book is a mine of authentic information and it will make compulsive reading for general practitioners and general readers alike.

BASHIR QURESHI

General practitioner, Hounslow, London

'SO THEY TELL ME'. AN ENCOUNTER WITH STROKE

Valerie Eaton Griffith

Chest, Heart and Stroke Association, London (1989)

205 pages. Price £2.50

This book is a moving account of the author's struggle to understand and then help in the rehabilitation of people who are recovering from a stroke.

In the mid 1960s Valerie Eaton Griffith was asked to visit a local celebrity: film star Pat Neal, wife of Roald Dahl. Shortly after the birth of her fifth child Pat Neal had had a stroke. Together with a band of helpers her husband was keeping the family together, but he was conscious of the fact that his wife was not progressing either physically or mentally. Valerie had

not encountered a situation like this before but gradually she saw the problems and tried to devise ways of dealing with them. The process of teaching and learning was slow but eventually Pat Neal was able to appear in public again.

In 1973 the Chest and Heart Association became interested in her methods and offered sponsorship to promote the expansion of her work. Since that time the Voluntary Stroke Scheme has developed into a worldwide initiative. This book gives an interesting insight into how the development occurred. Like so many voluntary organizations the scheme was started by a few enthusiasts, with no budget, only a good idea. The demand existed and the author took up the challenge. This book is compulsive reading for anyone interested in stroke rehabilitation.

MARTIN BARKER

General practitioner, Stamford, Lincolnshire

SEWARD'S BEDSIDE DIAGNOSIS (13th edition)

David Mattingley and Charles Seward

Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh (1989)

373 pages. Price £17.95

This is a lovely book. My much thumbed second edition of 1952 steered me through my final MB examinations, not so much because of its factual content which is high, but because its clear and logical taxonomy taught a method of classifying thought to make the maximum use of the minimum knowledge. Books that teach thinking as well as knowing are rare.

Seward's bedside diagnosis takes a symptomatic approach to the patient's problem, guiding student and physician from presentation to that 'most fascinating, responsible and rewarding of all forms of detection — the diagnosis of disease'. The thirteenth edition, updated by David Mattingley, the late Charles Seward's successor at the Royal Devon and Exeter hospital, contains much that is new while retaining the familiar layout of the earlier editions. There are new sections on topics such as anorexia nervosa, epiglottitis and Reye's syndrome. The first chapter on the physiology of pain provides a good summary of this common, but often poorly understood and inadequately managed, problem. The acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) presents the author with the problem that anything written about it is out of date on publication.

This book is doubly recommended to present day students and to general practitioner trainees, especially those preparing for the MRCGP.

ROBIN HULL

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