



EXPLORATIONS WITH FAMILIES

Group analysis and family therapy

Robin Skynner (edited by John R Schlapobersky)

Tavistock/Routledge, London (1990)

438 pages. Price £14.99

This is a collection of papers and lectures by one of the founders of the Institute of Group Analysis and the Institute of Family Therapy, edited by a devoted amanuensis. Some of the early papers discuss the selection of patients suitable for psychotherapy or for family therapy and these provide a background of the development of Skynner's ideas. The next section is concerned with encouraging doctors to see whole families together, stressing the value and safety of the group approach. This part is of considerable interest to any general practitioner prepared to take a forward-thinking view of family interaction. School phobia, marital problems and sexual counselling are given excellent descriptions and treatment is illustrated in some short case studies. The approach is subtle but straightforward.

Family therapy is then considered from a more theoretical viewpoint. Skynner accepts that both structural and systemic family therapy encompass useful techniques, although he prefers to take an analytic viewpoint when the case is complex. He is firmly in touch with his own inner world and uses transference phenomena as a significant part of his own style of family therapy. He tries not merely to be eclectic in accepting useful techniques from whoever has developed them, but is concerned to blend the theories of the different schools of family therapy into a unified model based on group-analytical concepts. This section is perhaps the least successful part of the book. He tries to unite the beliefs on which the various theories of family therapy are constructed just as he attempts to heal the families who consult him.

As a therapist, teacher and writer Skynner is renowned and successful, but the weakness of this interesting book seems to rest in his drive to bring together incompatible psychological theories in his personal approach to the practical realities of group and family therapy.

OLIVER SAMUEL

General practitioner and Balint group leader, Pinner, Middlesex

DIFFERENTIAL DIAGNOSIS IN DERMATOLOGY

Richard Ashton and Barbara Leppard

Radcliffe Medical Press, Oxford (1990)

300 pages. Price £49.50

This book is a desk top aid to diagnosis and as there is no systematic consideration of aetiology or pathology and no reference to management, it needs to be used alongside a standard textbook of dermatology.

Diagnosis is assisted by considering a skin disease step by step. The search begins by determining the area of skin affected and

whether the rash is erythematous or not, and then by consulting the appropriate chapter. Each chapter contains a series of algorithms. The user decides which to consult by referring to a list at the beginning of the chapter which contains further possible features of the rash. One then proceeds down the appropriate algorithm making a series of decisions about yet further characteristics. The features involved vary with each algorithm, as does the order in which they are taken. The last line comprises a series of boxes giving the diagnosis.

The introduction details the technical terms used in describing skin lesions and is excellent. The description of each skin disorder is concise and the accompanying photographs excellent — perhaps it is worth buying the book simply to have these diseases drawn together by anatomical area. I found the algorithms difficult to use however. It may be a matter of fine judgement to decide between certain of the alternative characteristics, for example whether a rash is pink, pink-brown or orange-brown. More importantly, I felt a certain disquiet with the method itself. This relies on step by step collection of information resulting in final matching with a known disease yet I found myself guessing at the diagnosis and then seeking confirmation from the description, pictures or algorithms. The habits of a lifetime are difficult to displace.

In concept original, I found this aid to diagnosis difficult to use in the way recommended, though familiarity with the range of algorithms may make this easier. The book may come into its own when, on seeing a skin disease, no hypothesis suggests itself and the mind remains a complete blank — a not uncommon occurrence. It will remain on my desk for such an eventuality. It is certainly a stimulating teaching aid.

ALEX L BROWN

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CARING FOR SOMEONE WITH AIDS

David Yelding

Consumers' Association, Hertford (1990)

312 pages. Price £6.95

The last few years have seen an explosive growth in the number of organizations concerned with the acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS). Some of the 300 or so AIDS agencies in the UK, such as AIDS Care, Education and Training (ACET) and the Terrence Higgins Trust, were conceived as a response to AIDS, but established agencies, such as the Department of Social Security, have also had to address the needs of people suffering from the disease.

This book describes the diverse range of services that are available in helping to care for someone with AIDS, including detailed information on how to make the best use of them. There is information and advice on a wide range of subjects including legal issues, obtaining cash help, transport, complementary medicine and counselling. Two necessarily long chapters suc-

ceed in making social security benefits and housing legislation comprehensible — not an easy task. The sections on caring and caring for carers are excellent, and reflect the experience and contribution both of the people who have AIDS and their carers.

My main complaint is that the book is difficult to use. Large type page numbers without chapter headings at the top of each page are not enough to guide us through 300 pages. The sparsely numbered contents page is also inadequate. These stylistic features detract from what is a useful and much needed book.

MORRIS GALLAGHER

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COMMONSENSE GERIATRICS

M Keith Thompson

Clinical Press, Bristol (1990)

206 pages. Price £12.50

There are now a number of British general practice texts dealing with the care of older people. This is Keith Thompson's second and it presents a better view of this important subject as seen through the eyes of an experienced and observant general practitioner than did his previous book.

The topic is covered in seven informative and thought-provoking sections — first principles of geriatric care; the ageing process; common clinical problems; specialty aspects; society, the family and the community; the role of drugs, the primary care team and the hospital; and the whole person.

Keith Thompson epitomizes the individuality of general practice, which means that while it is impossible to agree with everything he states it is difficult not to be stimulated and challenged by his enthusiastic and scholarly presentation of the subject matter. As promised in the title, common sense prevails throughout.

This book can be recommended as comprehensive and informative and would be a valuable reference book to have within easy reach.

CHARLES B FREER

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MEDICINES, THE NHS AND EUROPE

D Taylor and A Maynard

King's Fund Institute, London (1990)

24 pages. Price £5.95

The main factual content of this booklet is an eclectic and workmanlike review of the history of prescribing regulations and cost-control of medicines in the UK. The information about the system of state regulation of National Health Service drug pricing would interest many general practitioners, being difficult to obtain elsewhere at such modest cost. This alone makes the book worth buying at a time when new emphasis is being placed on control of prescribing costs.

On the other hand, those who buy this book for information on the European dimension may be disappointed as only six pages are devoted to this. To be fair, there is not much to say. It is still too early to predict the effect of changes in the pricing of pharmaceuticals, control of advertising, de-regulation of prescription only medicines and many other matters with any accuracy. The authors are, however, well placed to indulge in informed speculation. They conclude that more favourable European Community-wide measures, especially in patent protection, are necessary to protect the pharmaceutical industry against vital damage from unrestrained price competition.

The authors also predict that there will be closer collaboration between general practitioners and community pharmacists. They warn that National Health Service measures such as prescribing budgets and PACT (prescribing analysis and cost) may prove counter-productive if they lead to undue attention being given to simple cost-effectiveness, while other important factors such as the properties of medicines and patient preferences are neglected. This is only one of their examples of the dangers of applying simplistic market-oriented economic theory to the complex business of prescription of medicines, particularly in a system such as the National Health Service.

ROSS J TAYLOR

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