

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

*General practitioner, South Shields*

## 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

*General practitioner, Glasgow*

## 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

*Head of Department of General Practice,  
University of Aberdeen*

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