

through their own human responses. Not to do this as a profession invites retreat behind the excuse of 'not enough time' and burnout.

This is a thought-provoking study of reactions to parkinsons disease as a paradigm of chronic and progressive illness. Hopefully awareness of what we do will help us respond more appropriately as individuals and as a group in future.

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THE AFRICAN BACKGROUND TO MEDICAL SCIENCE Essays on African history, science and civilizations

Charles S Finch

Karnak House, London (1990)

212 pages. Price £13.95 (h/b), £7.95 (p/b)

Finch's surprising book is a collection of essays, bound together by a unifying theme: reclaiming ancient Egypt as an African civilization. The idea is familiar to readers and viewers of those popular Africanists, Basil Davidson and Ali Mazrui; the element of surprise lies in Finch's extensive discussion of theories about the racial identity of the ancient Egyptians, a rehearsal of old arguments which are evidently still pertinent to American scholarship. However, Finch offers a satisfying rebuff to those who would over-refine racial differentiation using biomolecular markers.

African primacy is argued in chapters on Africa and the semitic world; on the contribution of Imhotep; on the great queens of ancient Ethiopia; and on the origins of christianity. Two essays deal more extensively with medicine. In his discussion of traditional African medicine, Finch perhaps relies over-much on selected anthropological sources, while with ancient Egyptian medical science and symbolism, he sometimes stretches his connections, and our credulity, to breaking point.

Much inherently fascinating material is presented in this book, but the work of J Worth Estes should be read for a more temperate assessment of ancient Egyptian medicine. For other parts of Africa, in less distant times, there is an accumulating body of work that places disease and healing in its social context; some of this effectively demythologizes 'science'. Finch's evident enthusiasm for Africa, his enquiring mind and combative style, might find even more fertile fields in Africa's wider and more recent past.

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PARKINSON'S DISEASE AND EMPLOYMENT — THE EXPERIENCE OF 43 PATIENTS

John Williams (ed)

Parkinson's Disease Society, London (1990)

20 pages. Price £1.00

This 20 page booklet is a compilation of the experiences of 43 people with parkinson's disease. All were relatively young when the disease was diagnosed and they were asked by John Williams to describe the effects which parkinson's disease had had upon their ability to hold down a job.

The accounts are succinct and, in many cases, moving. They reveal the frustration and depression associated with the discovery of having a chronic and deteriorating illness; they also emphasize the relief which some individuals experience when

a diagnosis is eventually made. This should remind doctors of the difficulty of recognizing parkinson's disease when the 'classic' signs are absent.

The majority of contributors came from professional and managerial backgrounds. Many had adapted their work environment in order to cope better with the disease. This was less easy for those who relied on manual dexterity. Employers varied in the way in which they offered advice and practical help. On the whole, colleagues at work appear to have been supportive; frankness about the condition at an early stage seems to have helped with this.

The booklet is written for sufferers from parkinson's disease. I am sure that many will find it of value, both for the practical ideas which it contains and for the insight into the way in which others have coped with the illness. I would commend it also to doctors for the same reasons.

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THE DYING PATIENT — TRYING TO TELL (video)

The Lisa Sainsbury Foundation, Croydon (1989)

Price £25.00

This video is produced by the Lisa Sainsbury Foundation in collaboration with members of the department of general practice at Leicester University. It shows five different consultations with a woman suffering from carcinoma of the oesophagus, from her initial presentation and diagnosis to her final days at home. Each scene is sensitively acted and though some are unnaturally short, they each contain enough strengths and weaknesses to provoke valuable discussion. One scene also involves a visit from a district nurse. I feel that this video will be particularly valuable for a primary health care team who are considering their different roles in terminal care and who wish to learn from each others' experience and approach.

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CLINICAL FORENSIC MEDICINE

W D S McLay (ed)

Pinter, London (1990)

350 pages. Price £18.50

This book represents a complete revision of the guidelines on which police surgeons and all doctors who find themselves in professional contact with the criminal justice system have relied in recent times. Much has happened since the publication of the *New police surgeon* and it had become increasingly necessary for it to be revised.

The accumulated knowledge and wisdom in this book is remarkable, representing as it does the experience and knowledge of the many authors who have been selected to contribute. Each chapter is a gem in its own right, offering practical guidance as well as valuable philosophy on the particular subjects.

The book is less bulky than the earlier publication and is therefore easier to carry around. Although there are few photographs, the illustrations are good and are probably clearer than photographs would be.

Clinical forensic medicine must be regarded as essential for all those working in this field or preparing for examination in medical jurisprudence. The editor and all the authors must be congratulated for bringing us right up to date in a rapidly moving field.

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