

ed admirably. It is an inexpensive book, well illustrated and well-produced which I recommend without reservation to anyone interested in the present and past of the general practitioner hospitals and indeed the development of general practice in this country.

IRVINE LOUDON

Wellcome research fellow, Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, University of Oxford

UNDERSTANDING BACK TROUBLE

E Rudinger (series ed)

Consumers' Association, London (1991)

151 pages. Price £8.95

It is a pleasure to read a book that allows the reader to do exactly what the title suggests. Fifty million working days are lost annually in the United Kingdom as a result of back trouble and there are a multitude of explanations and remedies for this almost universal problem. Thus, in a sea of confusion for the sufferer, and sometimes for the doctor, *Understanding back trouble* provides a rock of clarity and simplicity.

Doctors increasingly supplement verbal advice with leaflets, but a book for every patient with back pain would clearly be excessive. However, for those with chronic back pain, who have to learn to live with it, this book is an excellent supplement to good medical advice. This view was confirmed for me by one such patient to whom I loaned the book.

Each chapter is self-contained so the book can readily be dipped into. The last two chapters, 'Taking care of your back' and 'Exercise', are excellent, as is the check list of preventive advice. With the current emphasis on prevention, this book is in keeping with the aims of the general practitioner contract and should certainly be bought by every practice.

R M MILNE

CONCERNING THE CARERS

Occupational health for health care workers

J A Lunn and H A Waldron

Butterworth Heinemann, London (1991)

155 pages. Price £12.50

This is a short medical textbook in the traditional style containing the accumulated wisdom of two senior doctors. The introduction notes that the National Health Service has a very poor history of caring for its employees and the authors have set out to redress the balance. Much of the text, such as the section on prevention of accidents, is very helpful although the absence of references and a didactic style 'based on a wide range of experience and more than 20 years practice' is better suited to the non-medical reader.

A major deficiency is in the section on stress. Much stress in junior doctors is induced by their conditions of work but the authors dismiss this as the 'unique experience of those early post qualification years'. Their view on health promotion in medical students is equally simple: 'Selection procedures must be adapted to ensure that those chosen are likely to be able to withstand the rigours of training and subsequent life as a doctor'. There is no hint that prevention might include changes to the medical environment or that doctors with personal experience of illness make an essential contribution to the welfare of patients. The telephone number of the National Counselling Service for Sick Doctors (071-580 3160) is a significant omission from the list of information sources.

CLIVE RICHARDS

Tutor in public health medicine, University of Bristol

CELEBRATION

Margaret Spufford

Fontana, London (1989)

121 pages. Price £2.95

Celebration is more than one individual's story, it is a profound exploration of pain and suffering. Dr Margaret Spufford, a professional historian and Benedictine tertiary, has written a book which should be essential reading for anyone interested in medical ethics.

While coping with the pain of her own osteoporosis, Dr Spufford's infant daughter, Briget, was diagnosed as having cystinosis and given a poor prognosis: 'almost certain death at between the age of eight and fourteen years'. The book describes the problems of living at 'the frontiers of medical knowledge', and of creating a normal, secure, loving environment for the family.

Nurses, doctors, surgeons, au pairs and even a friendly bank manager, receive praise for their support. However, Dr Spufford comments on the difficulty health professionals have in imagining 'the depth of ignorance and shock they are dealing with in parents new to an experience which they themselves undergo all the time'. Six hourly blood tests taught Briget to learn to fear, a process Dr Spufford found almost unbearable to witness. However, her daughter's emotional normality was of the highest priority.

Having a child in hospital for a year puts physical and emotional strain on parents who 'no longer share the same world'. In addition, there is a lack of community care for the young chronically sick adult. 'One can create a universe for a small handicapped child but one cannot create one for an adolescent who has lost a peer group from the innate effects of the disease and too much isolating medical experience'.

With advances in medical technology and diminishing resources, doctors are increasingly faced with ethical dilemmas. This book gives a rare insight into the ethical dilemmas which patients share and from whom doctors can learn a great deal.

DAVID JEFFREY

General practitioner, Evesham, Worcestershire

IT'S ABOUT TIME (video)

Lederle Pharmaceutical Company, Gosport (1991)

Free

It's about time begins with a caricature of an overworked doctor which is overwritten and overplayed. Interspersed with this are a series of views from 'talking head' experts who tell us how to organize ourselves.

This approach has little educational value as it stimulates little response in the viewer. If television is to reach its real and considerable potential for learning (and justify its considerable expense) then it must stimulate thought and promote discussion. This reaction should occur in the viewers who can then explore the principles illustrated by the videotape in terms of their own experience and circumstance. Factual information should be provided by the teacher who conducts the session or in written material supplied with the videotape.

A great deal has been written about time management in general practice. The 16 minutes needed to view this videotape would have been better spent reading some of this material, before a small group discussion.

ROBIN HULL

Macmillan senior lecturer in palliative care, Birmingham University