



CONTROVERSIES IN THERAPEUTICS

Peter Rubin (ed)

British Medical Journal, London (1991)

67 pages. Price £9.95

Doctors love marginal decisions, and any who have thrown away their back issues of the *British Medical Journal* will enjoy *Controversies in therapeutics* which consists of reprints of a recent series of 17 articles. Each article contains two essays offering contrasting approaches to a controversial topic, with a short comment from Peter Rubin who casts his editor's vote for the doctor who wants to find out what to do. The most interesting pieces are on: iron in pregnancy; long term H₂ antagonists; generic prescribing; otitis media; benzodiazepine dependence; and urinary infections in children. These contain useful material for anyone working on a practice formulary.

Although this is a book aimed at general practitioners only one of the 37 authors is a general practitioner, and it shows. The article entitled 'Thrombolysis and the general practitioner' was written by two consultant cardiologists when the Royal College of General Practitioners has embarked on what appears to be the definitive trial on the subject, 'childhood otalgia' is used in place of earache and the article on the management of constipation was written by a professor of medicine and a gastroenterologist.

However, I learned from this book how important it is to determine what is and what is not controversial. The temptation to spend too long reflecting over marginal decisions must be resisted. Controversy carries the risk that we will ignore, as boring, the undisputed, effective elements central to our work.

NICHOLAS BRADLEY
General practitioner, Exeter

THE ART OF GENERAL PRACTICE (4th edition)

David Morrell

Oxford University Press (1991)

157 pages. Price £8.95 (p/b), £20.00 (h/b)

Professor Morrell is the doyen of academic general practice, and earlier editions of his book have been widely accepted as thorough and valuable aids to anyone needing an introduction to the discipline. This latest edition, to which the original title has been restored, sets out to bring the work up to date.

It has chapters on the characteristics of general practice, problem solving, history taking, physical examination, prognosis and treatment, and a section on prevention, health education and the primary care team. All offer views balanced to suit the needs of the undergraduates at whom the book is aimed; I would also be happy if they were read by doctors from other disciplines,

politicians and the managers of regional health authorities and family health services authorities.

The strength of the work, however, lies in what it carries over from the earlier editions: the updating is thin. Since the fundamental problems and common situations of medicine in general practice have not changed greatly in the last decade this may not matter greatly to a new reader, but I was disappointed. There is scarcely a reference later than 1980; and some statements are misleadingly out of date, for example, that appointment systems have become popular in the last 10 years. There is nothing about either computers or audit, yet both are subjects that students trying to understand the ways in which doctors in primary care are defining their problems need guidance on.

No review is complete without a few niggles. I was irritated by the apparent equation of tonsillitis and pharyngitis, and the perennial issue of the use of antibiotics in upper respiratory infections is dealt with inadequately. I was not happy with the title either: the book is about the craft, not the art, of general practice, and quite rightly so. The creative aspects of general practice would demand a very different format and could not mean much to anyone who had not mastered the craft.

Medical students are not renowned for an interest in books about general practice, but those who do read this one will not be shortchanged. For the next edition though there must be a more thorough revision.

CONRAD M HARRIS
Professor of general practice, University of Leeds

ABC OF MAJOR TRAUMA

D Skinner, P Driscoll and R Easlam (eds)

British Medical Journal, London (1991)

117 pages. Price £12.95

This book lives up to the standards of other publications in the ABC series. It is liberally illustrated with high quality photographs and illustrations. The layout of the pages makes for easy reading with well positioned summary notes.

The book deals with the management of serious and life-threatening injuries that require prompt treatment. The majority of the contents are related to the management of trauma within the controlled environment of an accident and emergency department. The treatments described pre-suppose the presence of fully trained medical and nursing staff and sophisticated resuscitation equipment.

General practitioners may form an integral part of such a team, especially in more rural areas, and the contents of this book will have particular relevance to them. In urban areas, where major trauma services are provided by a combination of hospital accident unit and ambulances staffed with paramedics, general practitioners may still have a role. This role will be

medical officer at a major incident is well described. The importance of triage in classifying casualties is well covered.

Although the book is not directed towards the daily functions of general practice, there are some circumstances in which general practitioners will find its contents useful. Practitioners who, by virtue of geographical isolation, become involved in more advanced resuscitation, or those who develop an interest in major trauma management will find the book of interest. There are other sections which are of more general relevance such as the treatment of 'once in a life-time' occurrences like tension pneumothorax or cardiac tamponade.

Other topics which I found of interest were guidelines for the referral of head injuries for a neurosurgical opinion, and the reminder that minor injuries may conceal underlying serious pathology. *ABC of major trauma* deals with all injuries in a methodical manner and the description of a scoring system for the assessment of injuries may have wider application to general practice.

BRUCE LERVY

General practitioner, Swansea and West Glamorgan
branch medical officer, British Red Cross Society

GP REFERRALS TO HOSPITAL

A guide for family health services authorities

A Coulter, M Roland and D Wilkin

Centre for Primary Care Research, University of Manchester (1991)

51 pages. Price £2.00

Some referral decisions make themselves — a patient has a hernia or needs a hearing aid. Others can be a source of angst for the embattled, cost conscious general practitioner. From individual cases with their many facets the practice referral statistics are compiled ready for the annual report.

The family health services authority receives the practice statistics and in turn compiles averages and ranges for the whole authority. What are they to make of the results? Is a practice's low referral rate to ear, nose and throat departments a chance event or is there a potential problem? Can any conclusions be drawn from a high referral rate for palliative care? And how should the information be fed back to practices?

We all know there are no facile answers to these questions, but some sensible rules have been formulated in *GP referrals to hospital*. Every family health services authority will find the guidelines in this small booklet indispensable, especially in their emphasis on a careful non-judgemental approach. Many practices will also find the initial section on preparing referral data for practice reports invaluable.

MIKE PRINGLE

Senior lecturer in general practice, Queen's Medical Centre,
Nottingham

BREAST CANCER

Lesley Fallowfield with Andrew Clark

Routledge, London (1991)

135 pages. Price £20.00

Over the last few years there have been many volumes published on cancer and terminal illness and it is refreshing to read one that makes a concerted effort to be balanced in its outlook and to avoid the all too common trap of inappropriate sentimentality. *Breast cancer* is a relatively small volume, clearly printed on non-reflective paper. However, its brevity is deceptive. The text is concentrated, with many references and thought-provoking statements. Of particular value are the sections gently exploring accepted dogma: reminding the reader that distress to partner and family is all too often underestimated; re-examining the causes of anxiety in patients with breast cancer; looking at the effect of the phenomenon of recurrence; and finally dealing with the role of the counsellor.

The description of a patient's perception of radiotherapy and chemotherapy are essential reading for any practitioner. The potential for professional counselling input at all stages of the process from diagnosis, through treatment to death is usefully explored. However, I would have liked to have seen the need for professionally trained counsellors, properly supervised and supported, even more firmly emphasized.

This book provides thought-provoking reading for the health care professional, and a plethora of references to help those who wish to gain a deeper insight into the field.

ROBIN PUGSLEY

General practitioner, Grantham, Lincolnshire

College Publications RECENT TITLES

Higher Professional Education Courses in the United Kingdom (Occasional Paper 51)

A nationwide survey of seven higher professional education courses which compares methods of organization, content and means of evaluation. Useful for those running similar courses in future. £6.50

Interprofessional Collaboration in Primary Health Care Organizations (Occasional Paper 52)

The report of a study of the working relationships between general practitioners, district nurses and health visitors, which makes a number of proposals for improving teamwork. £6.50

Milestones — the Diary of a Trainee GP

The diary of a young general practitioner in training for general practice during his practice year. Describes problems and experiences that are relevant for all trainees. £9.95

The above can be obtained from the Sales Office, Royal College of General Practitioners, 14 Prince's Gate, London SW7 1PU. (Enquiries, Tel: 071-823 9698). Prices include postage. Payment should be made with order. Cheques should be made payable to RCGP Enterprises Ltd. Access and Visa welcome (Tel: 071-225 3048, 24 hours).

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS

THE MACMILLAN EDUCATION CENTRE

of The Dorothy House Foundation

offers

"TAKING THE LID OFF"

A short Workshop for GPs interested in developing skills in the physical and psychological care of dying patients.

Dates: 16-18.10.91

Cost: £50.00

Venue: Dorothy House, Bath

For further information please contact: Jill Griffiths, Education Secretary, Macmillan Education Centre, 164 Bloomfield Road, Bath BA2 2AT. Tel: 0225 445545.