



CURRENT MEDICINE 4

D H Lawson (ed)

Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh (1994)

330 pages. Price £19.95

This book is the latest in a series commissioned by the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh to provide an overview of recent developments in medicine. There are two main sections. In the first, selected issues are thoroughly reviewed. In the second, the best current management of a series of major clinical problems is considered. Keeping up to date is a problem all doctors face. Textbooks are out of date before publication; editorials and review articles in the leading journals are more useful. This book is like a compendium of editorials and review articles. Each chapter is well indexed and all the topics covered are of importance to general practitioners.

The chapter on 'pharmacoeconomics' takes a broad look at the evaluation of alternative treatments, taking into account the quality of life and the economic and social consequences both for the individual and for the state. The cheapest may not represent the best value. Much investigation is urgently needed in this field to guide allocation of resources. The topic has especial relevance to general practitioners who are responsible for 80% of the drugs bill.

Chapter topics include asthma, colorectal cancer, urticaria, diabetes, diarrhoea in children, parkinsons disease, rheumatoid arthritis and pain in terminally ill patients. I particularly valued an account of herpes viruses, which draws together the current knowledge about herpes simplex, varicella zoster, Epstein-Barr virus, cytomegalovirus and human herpes virus type 6.

It is difficult to imagine a practising doctor who would not benefit from this book. It is directed towards members of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh and towards candidates for all the membership examinations of British royal colleges. The book, however, has a wider appeal — to all who wish to keep abreast of modern practice. I found it a most enjoyable and interesting read.

ALEXANDER L BROWN

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CARE OF THE DYING CHILD

Ann Goldman (ed)

Oxford University Press (1994)

214 pages. Price £16.50

Caring for a terminally ill child is an uncommon experience for general practitioners who are more likely to be confronted with the devastation of sudden and accidental death in childhood,

precisely those areas which this book does not address. This is very much a book by and for the hospital specialist team which has little to offer the general practitioner. The fact that the 'general practitioner' is not mentioned until page 90 is a reflection of this perspective.

For me the most valuable chapter, with insight for the general practitioner as family doctor, was the one by Avril Trapp on 'Support for the family', which contains an illuminating list of what families may need from helpers. The list includes: that we share, support and work together without becoming an added pressure on the family; that we recognize that needs may be different for each family member; and that we do not de-skill the family by coming into their home and diminishing their confidence.

On a different note, substitute primary care team for family and there are the makings of a charter which reflects primary care expectations of secondary care.

CHRIS DRINKWATER

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PSYCHIATRY IN GENERAL PRACTICE

C A H Watts and B M Watts

Royal College of General Practitioners, London (1994)

228 pages. Price £16.50 (RCGP members £15.00)

Psychiatry in general practice was written over 40 years ago by two exceptional general practitioners, Arthur and Betty Watts, both founder members of the College of General Practitioners. Rather than a textbook of psychiatry, 'a subject which interests some people and repels others', they aimed to provide an introduction to psychiatric work as it occurs in general practice. Estimating that of patients seen in the surgery with psychological problems three quarters can be managed satisfactorily by the general practitioner, they found 'something seriously wrong with our system of medicine when a great number of patients... are put off with placebos and are urged out of the surgery with all possible speed, without any attempt at radical treatment.'

Why has this book been republished after 42 years and what does it offer to today's reader? It is neglected classic, being one of the first books written for general practitioners by general practitioners to result from the renaissance of general practice taking place in the early 1950s. Well received in its day as 'an instructive and stimulating book' it played its part in the renaissance as 'a plea, based on experience, for the wider application of psychiatry by general practitioners to the many cases in their practices for which it is the only rational treatment' (*British Medical Journal*). The section on 'the deadly lure of compensation neurosis' makes interesting reading, as does the