A second major criticism relates to content. Hence instead of using the well accepted classification of hypertension proposed by the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology, the authors produce their own somewhat idiosyncratic version. Misspelling of Korotkoff does little to allay the readers' misgivings and similarly it is news to me that labetalol is a 'combined α and β_1 blocker and a β_2 agonist'.

The book is system rather than symptom orientated. In my medical ante-natal clinic, palpitation, faints and funny turns are amongst the commoner symptoms – I could find no mention of any of these problems in the index making the 'practical reference book' claimed by the publishers a little unbelievable. It may improve in a second edition but I fear it has a long long way to go.

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Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition: a Practical Guide. Third edition, G.D. Phillips and C.L. Odgers. Pp. xi + 272, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, London, Melbourne, New York, 1986. £13.95.

As outlined by the authors 'The book is intended as a practical guide for student and for nursing, medical dietetic and pharmacy staff who are placed in the position of managing patients receiving parenteral and enteral nutrition'. Almost by definition a book of 236 pages and a further 23 pages of Appendices cannot achieve this. Moreover, it should be pointed out to the potential readership that the overall emphasis of the book is directed towards parenteral nutrition, the single chapter on enteral nutrition being 14 pages long. Having said this, there are a number of very good aspects of this book. The chapters on the physiological and biochemical bases of nutrition, metabolic effects of starvation, sepsis and trauma, carbohydrate, proteins and lipids are all very good. Some readers, however, may be rather irritated to find that the references are not referred to in the text. The chapter on water and electrolytes is outstanding.

I would take the authors to task about the emphasis they place on inflammatory bowel disease being a common indication for parenteral nutrition – particularly ulcerative colitis, as well as its use as an adjunct to various forms of cancer therapy, particularly when they later refer to the critical review of Brennan.

I do not think therefore that this is necessarily a book that students, nursing dietetic or pharmacy staff should buy. However, all medical libraries should carry a copy and this book would be a suitable reference for all house staff, nursing, dietetic and pharmacy staff and would be a suitable addition to departmental book collections as well as finding its way onto all wards where parenteral and enteral nutrition is practised.

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Practical Psychiatry of Old Age, John Wattis and Michael Church. Pp. x + 195, illustrated. Croom Helm, London, Sydney, 1986. £19.95 (hardback), £8.95 (paperback).

This is a friendly and enthusiastic book aiming to provide a basic text for a wide range of health and social care workers involved with providing psychiatric services for old people. The aim is to be essentially practical with an emphasis on the working together between members of a multi-disciplinary team rather than pre-occupation with too much theory, and this is perhaps the major strength of the text. The problem-solving approach is used fairly consistently and there are illustrative case histories supported by flow diagrams that are important in holding the reader's interest and maintaining firm contact with the realities of life.

The writing is by no means bland, some of the attitudes assumed may raise a few hackles, and there is considerable variation in the depth at which topics are dealt. These features may add to the attractiveness and palatability of the whole, but the absence of a positive discussion of the role of the general practitioner and the other members of the primary health care team does seem to be a weakness. Sad, because one would feel that general practitioners would be amongst the potential readership of this very useful book, and perhaps their role might be developed in further editions. No-one is left in any doubt that there is a great deal that can be done about psychiatric disorder in the elderly and useful guidance and ideas for further thinking are provided for people who are directly involved in the care of the elderly. One would think that the increasing number of administrators who have little direct experience of the work themselves might find this a useful text. The cost of the paperback edition is modest and should be within the reach of the pockets at which it is aimed.

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Prescribing – What, When and Why? John Fry, Martin Godfrey and Brian N.C. Prichard. Library of General Practice Vol.11. Pp. vi + 346. Churchill, Livingstone, Edinburgh, London, Melbourne, New York, 1986. £20.00.

I thought once of writing a paper on 'A Hundred Ways of Prescribing Nothing'. Like many good ideas it never got out of my pending file. Prescribing has often been used as a way of establishing doctor power or as a substitute for the difficult tasks of patient communication, health education and the alteration of fixed habits. For one stern practitioner that I heard of, the handing over of the folded slip was a mute signal that the consultation was at an end. No words could pass thereafter. There is a remnant here of the old bottle tradition that GPs inherited from the apothecaries. However, this may be, the prescription pad is likely for the foreseeable future to remain one of the tools of trade so this book designed to improve the use to which it is put is welcome. Written by a general practitioner, the editor of MIMS and a professor of clinical pharmacology it should be a very useful text for trainees in search of material to discuss during tutorials. They

will no doubt, like myself, find matters to disagree with but this is inevitable given the deliberately didactic style of the book, and no harm.

The first half contains a series of potted histories followed by advice on 'What it might be', 'How to decide?', 'What to do?', 'What choice?' and then a suggested prescription which is subjected to a 'critique'. These illustrate a number of commonly presenting symptoms such as backache, sore throat, menorrhagia etc. These are excellent, but occasional inconsistencies betray different views among the authors. Beclomethasone (Beconase), for instance, is said to have 'all the possible side effects' on page 63 but to have 'no long term steroid side effects' on page 66. In the case of the lady of 76 who has gradual and progressive swelling of feet and ankles for a few weeks the advice of 'bed rest for a few days' might be a quick route to a pulmonary embolus. I would also dispute the statement that 'it is wrong to prescribe anti-infective substances for vaginal discharge without information of the specific pathogens'.

The second half of the book covers topics in 'planned care' such as hypertension, diabetes and asthma. This is not quite so stimulating, partly because it leaves the specific questions of what exactly to prescribe for this patient in these circumstances for broad generalizations about treatment that could be found in many other books. It also extends to descriptions of aetiology and diagnosis and in an attempt to cover too much ground leaves no space for some important problems. Hypothyroidism for instance gets relegated to three lines with no suggested dosages. The discussion on atrial fibrillation does not mention the treatment of intermittent fibrillation which is a frequent and worrying problem in general practice. There is a good summary of contraception but the answer given to the question 'Whom to treat and why?': 'Any woman of childbearing age (about 20 percent of the population) may need contraceptive advice' seems rather sexist.

This volume however is certainly well put together and deserves a place on the library shelves of training practices.

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Recent Advances in Clinical Oncology. No. 2, edited by C.J. Williams and J.M.A. Whitehouse. Pp. xii + 256, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, London, Melbourne, New York, 1986. £30.00.

This is the second in a series of recent advances in clinical oncology which covers a very large range of topics. The subjects range from a variety of new developments such as oncogenes, interferon, hyperthermia and neutrons through clinical topics of screening for cancer, treatment of specific malignancies and the associated toxicities, and a variety of investigational techniques.

As is inevitable with such a mixed fare the standard of the various chapters is very variable. Some are really excellent and do provide very up-to-date reviews. Others are rather more pedestrian and give a somewhat tired overview of topics

which perhaps would not be regarded as absolutely current new developments. This does mean that the book is perhaps more of general interest to persons working in the cancer area and indeed those outside the immediate field than those who have more expert knowledge. This is not a bad thing as there is always a need to introduce areas of special interest to which readers can go for further references. This is well achieved by this particular book.

It would be easy to criticize individual chapters on the basis of events overtaking the publication time. Much has happened since the last references that are listed in this book but in most of the chapters this does not matter too much. The editors themselves state 'time is a ruthless judge of scientific progress' in their introduction and I think this does indicate the problem with such books. In spite of these reservations the reviewer can thoroughly recommend this book for all who wish to get an overview of a very wide range of interesting topics.

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Transcultural Psychiatry, edited by John L. Cox. Pp. vii + 337, illustrated. Croom Helm, London, Sydney, Dover, New Hampshire, 1986. £29.50.

A book of this title is not likely to attract avid attention as transcultural psychiatry does not have the most exciting image in mental health circles. It has a reputation of being concerned with esoterically named disorders from all parts of the world that turn out on close examination to be replicas of common mental disorders. The preoccupation with description of culture-bound syndromes has a mild intrinsic interest but not one that normally stimulates the reader.

This book is an exception to the rule and succeeds because it breaks outside the confines of most other texts on cultural aspects of psychiatry. It dares to enter forbidden territories such as the impact of racism and prejudice on mental illness (Dr Aggrey Burke), the dangers of exporting the British concepts of independence, self-sufficiency and personal responsibility to other cultures when describing mental illness (Dr H.B. Murphy), and the importance of politics as a determinant of psychiatric practice (Dr S.P. Sashidharan).

There are also interesting chapters about the particular difficulties experienced by ethnic minorities, overseas students and migrants which go some way towards explaining the curious quirks in the statistics of mental illness that continue to bother epidemiologists. Unfortunately it is easy to ask questions in transcultural psychiatry but much more difficult to obtain definitive answers. Why is it, for example, that the Irish have a much higher incidence of mental illness than the English whether or not they live in Ireland, England or anywhere else on this planet? Why do West Indians find their way into psychiatric hospitals through the intermediary of the police and compulsory orders whereas other ethnic minorities enter through more conventional channels? There are appeals throughout the text for what is described as 'an ethnocentric view' of mental illness, but I doubt that even