

planning should be merely confined to just over 5 pages. The chapter on audio-visual aids, likewise, was too superficial to be more than an aide-memoire to the teacher already conversant with such means of communication. A number of chapters were concerned with various examination (used in the sense of assessment) techniques and methods but it was not entirely clear when the authors were specifically referring to the MRCGP examination and when to examinations in general.

Fourteen of the 47 chapters were written by Marshall Marinker, Professor of Community Health in the University of Leicester, who is also one of the 3 editors of the book. Thirteen of these chapters were written in that easy but fluent and expressive style characteristic of him. The one chapter, no. 16 entitled 'Clinical Method', did not, in my view, fall into this group. I found it confused, confusing, unhelpful and misleading. To say that the intellectual processes occurring during a consultation in a hospital ward on the one hand and in a general practitioner's surgery or physician's consulting room on the other are different because the former takes longer and demonstrates the scientific method in clinical medicine whereas the latter is shorter and is based on pattern recognition and informed guesses misses the underlying principle whereby decision-making is arrived at in clinical medicine. I would also argue that it is not helpful for him to infer that clinicians in hospital (in this context, a teaching hospital) do not usually regard the patient as a person but merely as a vehicle to demonstrate some aspect of pathology (p. 24, in Chapter 4). No doubt this is true of some hospital clinicians, possibly even many but the truth of the matter is that they should be just as concerned in the patient as a person as any general practitioner.

All in all I enjoyed reading this book but it tried to do too much with the result that too much of the ground was covered too thinly.

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#### Today's Treatment—4

Articles published in the *British Medical Journal*. Pp. 178. British Medical Association, London, 1981. £4.50.

There is a certain irony that in a collection of 28 articles on 'Today's Treatment' 10 are deliberately devoted to adverse reactions. Describing those drugs which cause damage to this or that part of the body (e.g. skin, liver, lungs, kidney and heart) leads to ever-burgeoning lists. The drugs mentioned are those currently in use and few obsolete, or withdrawn, medications are included. While new drugs bring their own problems it is also apparent that even old-established drugs can produce hitherto unrecognized hazards, for instance nitrous oxide causing megaloblastosis.

Other topics deal succinctly with drug safety—how it is controlled by Review and Safety Committees and ensured by careful drug research before launching, and monitoring after general release. The physico-chemical factors influencing the pharmacokinetics of absorption, plasma protein binding and elimination of drugs are covered, as well as important drug interactions and drug usage in the extremes of age. There is also a contribution on prescription writing written by a pharmacist. Sandwiched somewhat uneasily, are 8 articles on anaesthesia which are not particularly drug orientated but do illustrate how wide and valuable are the services rendered by the anaesthetist in the different hospital departments.

The distinguished contributors are largely from academic units and include 7 professors—one fifth of the total. There is, however, not one general practitioner among them even though they do after all write more than 75% of all the

prescriptions written in the U.K. 'Today's Treatment' contains little that could not be ferreted out elsewhere, but its attraction will be that useful material is presented in neat, handy and attractive format, easy to read and also reasonably priced. It is the reviewer's belief that the main appeal of this fourth publication of a new series will be to those working in hospital, but that it will help all who have the daunting task of skillfully using the 'tools of their trade' while maximizing safety, and minimizing hazard.

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#### Western Diseases: Their Emergence and Prevention

Edited by H. C. TROWELL and D. P. BURKITT. Pp. xix + 456, illustrated. Edward Arnold, London, 1981. £28.50.

Conventional wisdom regarding health insists that there is a price to be paid for the life style of modern civilization. This book comprehensively documents the data-base for this assertion, using the information available from the developing countries of the world. The diseases considered are those characteristic of affluent Western technological societies, a definition which is carefully distinguished from one relating to diseases of civilization. Discussion is confined to cardiovascular, vascular, metabolic and colonic disorders, rather than the effects of industrial hazards or environmental pollution. The editors have drawn together 34 contributors from 5 continents who have written of their experience of the changing pattern of non-infective disease as Westernization has occurred in different communities. The book is divided into 7 parts. The first sets the scene from the Kenya and Uganda of the 1930s where the authors worked as physician and surgeon. Obesity, hypertension, diabetes mellitus, appendicitis, diverticular disease, varicose veins and haemorrhoids all emerge. Their presentation leads on in part two to a detailed discussion of the environmental factors which have been shown to influence the incidence of these, and many other disorders. A fascinating section follows which examines the health of hunter-gatherer communities whose traditional ways of life are still available for analysis. Parts four and five review the impact of Western life styles on the rural peasant agriculturalist, and the migrant into urban situations such as those in South Africa, New Zealand and Israel. The Far East with its accelerated economic and technological development has merited a section of its own.

The theme which is developed is the relationship of diet to Western diseases. It outweighs the effect of stress which has always existed, although it is expressed in different ways. The possibility that one is purely seeing the degenerative conditions which are seen in an ageing population is examined and discounted. Wealthy countries are characterized by a high consumption of animal protein, fat, sugar and salt with a resultant increase in total protein and food energy intake. The book thus concludes with a review of the evidence for the contentious suggestion that some illnesses such as essential hypertension, angina, and diabetes mellitus regress if patients revert to the diet and level of physical activity of early peasant agricultural groups. In order to achieve a global view, there is inevitably some overlap between the contributors who in general support the overall conclusion made by the editors; however, the book does represent a unique synthesis of knowledge from many different fields. It is well referenced and indexed and will provide a useful source for the stimulation of inter-disciplinary research and discussion.

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