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*Postgraduate Medical Journal* publishes original papers on subjects of current clinical importance and welcomes review articles with extensive, up-to-date bibliographies as guides to further reading. Several symposia are published each year, each devoted to a single subject and written by specialists in different disciplines. Most issues include authoritative Current Surveys of clinical problems, and well documented Reports of cases of particular interest, and Book Reviews.

A 'Notice to Contributors' is published on the inside back cover of this issue. The Editor reserves the right to make changes which may clarify or condense papers where this is considered desirable.

The Journal is covered by *Current Contents*, *Biological Abstracts*.

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## Books received

- Aids to Obstetrics and Gynaecology for MRCOG Part 2.* By GORDON M. STIRRAT. Pp. 266. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh and London, 1983. £4.99.
- Annual Review of Immunology.* Edited by W. E. PAUL, C. G. FATHMAN and H. METZGER. Vol. 1. Pp. 666, illustrated. Annual Reviews Inc., Palo Alto, California, 1983. \$30.00.
- Antibiotics for Surgical Infections. Antimicrobial Chemotherapy Series.* By P. J. SANDERSON. Pp. vii + 262. Research Studies Press, a Division of John Wiley & Sons Ltd., Chichester, New York, Brisbane, Toronto, Singapore, 1983. £24.50.
- Clinical Radiology.* By G. SIMON and A. J. A. WIGHTMAN. 4th edn. Pp. 311, illustrated. Butterworths, London, Boston, 1983. £27.50.
- A Colour Atlas of Clinical Neurology.* By M. PARSONS. Pp. 216, illustrated. Wolfe Medical Publications, London, 1983. £35.00.
- Diagnosis and Management of Acute Poisoning. Diagnosis and Management Series.* By ALEXANDER T. PROUDFOOT. Pp. viii + 237. Blackwell Scientific Publications, Oxford, London, Edinburgh, Boston, Melbourne, 1982. £7.50.
- Diagnosis and Management of Endocrine Diseases. Diagnosis and Management Series.* ANTHONY D. TOFT, IAN W. CAMPBELL and JOHN SETH. Pp. vii + 414, illustrated. Blackwell Scientific Publications, Oxford, London, Edinburgh, Boston, Melbourne, 1981. £12.50.
- Diagnosis and Management of Renal and Urinary Diseases. Diagnosis and Management Series.* J. MICHAEL BOULTON-JONES, J. DOUGLAS BRIGGS and TIMOTHY B. HARGREAVE. Pp. vii + 309, illustrated. Blackwell Scientific Publications, Oxford, London, Edinburgh, Boston, Melbourne, 1982. £10.50.
- Diagnosis and Management of Respiratory Diseases. Diagnosis and Management Series.* By GRAHAM K. CROMPTON. Pp. ix + 269, illustrated. Blackwell Scientific Publications, Oxford, London, Edinburgh, Boston, Melbourne, 1980. £9.80.
- Laboratory Investigation of Endocrine Disorders.* By MICHAEL R. WILLS and BILL HAVARD. 2nd edn. Pp. xiii + 111. Butterworths, London, Boston, Durban, Singapore, Sydney, Toronto, Wellington, 1983. £5.50.
- Manual of Practical Dermatology. Medicine in the Tropics Series.* By J. H. S. PETTIT. Pp. 219, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, London, 1983. £7.95.
- Modern Aspects of Gold Therapy. Rheumatology. An Annual Review.* Edited by M. SCHATTEKIRCHNER and W. MULLER. Vol. 8. Pp. 229, illustrated. Karger, Basle, 1983. Sw.Fr. 130.00, \$78.00.
- The New Good Birth Guide. How to Research and Plan the Kind of Birth to suit you and your Partner.* By SHEILA KITZINGER. Pp. 443, illustrated. Penguin Books, London, 1983. £3.95.
- The Normal Child. Some Problems of the Early Years and Their Treatment.* By R. S. ILLINGWORTH. 8th edn. Pp. 374, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh and London, 1983. £12.00.
- Outline of Fractures.* By J. CRAWFORD ADAMS. 8th edn. Pp. 324, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh and London, 1983. £7.25.
- The Physician's Book of Lists.* By D. M. MARGULIES and M. S. THALER. Pp. xiii + 290. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh and London, 1983. £7.95.
- Recent Advances in Perinatal Medicine.* Edited by M. L. CHISWICK. Pp. 234, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, London, 1983. £15.00.
- Rheumatology and Rehabilitation: Diagnosis and Management.* Edited by HEDLEY BERRY, ERIC HAMILTON and JOHN GOODWILL. Pp. 266, illustrated. Croom Helm, London, Canberra, 1983. £16.95 (hardback), £8.95 (paperback).
- Sexual Problems and their Management.* By C. G. FAIRBURN, M. G. DICKERSON and J. GREENWOOD. Pp. 112, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone Medical Text, Churchill Livingstone, London, Edinburgh, 1983. £3.95.
- Virus Diseases and the Skin.* By T. W. E. ROBINSON and R. B. HEATH. Pp. 194, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, London, Melbourne, New York. 1983. £15.00.

## Book reviews

### How to Write and Publish Papers in the Medical Sciences

By EDWARD J. HUTH. Pp. ix + 203. ISI Press, Philadelphia, 1982. \$11.95 U.S.A.; \$14.95 all other countries (softcover); \$17.95 U.S.A.; \$20.95 all other countries (hardcover).

On 1 October 1980, the Lancet and British Medical Journal held a symposium "Meet the Editors" at The Medical Society of London. The editors of these 2 journals, of the New England Journal of Medicine and Dr Edward J. Huth of the Annals of Internal Medicine on the same platform allowed me, as Chairman, to examine these savants on the mysteries and complexities of scientific writing. Ed Huth conceded the need for firm guidance of American writers; Thorne's Better Medical Writing was selling well in the United States (everyone knew that Thorne was Stephen Lock of the BMJ) and was already making some impact on American style, but Huth had his own lessons to teach and had already set them out in manuscript. This nicely-produced book is the outcome.

A prospective medical writer has a choice of some 20 authors all committed to simplifying his task. Most of them fail because they seem to take for granted an inborn ability to express thoughts in words. Huth is frank from the start: writing is hard work if you want to write well. Having made this point, he describes in 20 chapters

how to conceive a paper, write it, select the journal, adjust prose and scientific style to the editor's decrees and see it through to print.

The chief asset of this book lies in the author's ability to assemble the points that make a paper acceptable to a well-informed editor. His years as editor of a journal with high writing standards have alerted him to faults in description and presentation that pass unnoticed in imaginative writing but tend to blunt a scientific message. He advises constant self-questioning starting with the title—does it begin with a non-specific opening like 'An Investigation into...' or 'A Review of...'? He prefers the instant impact title, something like 'Aspirin for Treatment of Headache: A Double-Blind Study with Placebo Control'. Does the abstract condense the message within the prescribed length? Does the Introduction set the stage adequately? Are there unnecessary references? Which tables and illustrations can be deleted? Lessons in self-editing of this sort can be beyond price to the novice author introducing him to a writing discipline that, given the motivation and a modicum of talent, becomes easier with practice.

If Ed Huth and his book had appeared one generation earlier, J. D. Bernal might not have complained, in the Social Function of Science (1939) that much, if not all, of what is published in medical journals didn't deserve to be published at all. He had in mind the

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