Book Reviews

Advanced Medicine 22. Proceedings of a Conference Held at the Royal College of Physicians of London 10–13 February 1986, edited by David R. Triger. Pp. xiii + 416, illustrated. Baillière Tindall, London, Philadelphia, Toronto, Mexico City, Rio de Janeiro, Sydney, Tokyo, Hong Kong, 1986. £19.95.

This excellent book is an edited account of the 22nd Advanced Medicine Conference held at the Royal College of Physicians in London in February 1986. I would highly recommend it both to physicians in training and to consultant general physicians as one of the better ways of keeping up to date with progress in medical science and its impact on clinical medicine. At £19.95 it is also, by current standards, good value. Contained within its 416 pages are reviews on regulatory mechanisms (interferons, calcium and atrial peptides), clinical immunology (advances in transplantation, HLA typing, new ideas on the pathogenesis of autoimmune disease, and the value of plasmapheresis), clinical trials in medicine (propranolol for variceal haemorrhage, blood pressure, transient ischaemic attacks, and the medical benefits of oral contraceptives), infectious diseases (AIDS virus, reactive arthritis, campylobacters, chlamydia, and tropical liver infections), new techniques (angioplasty, endoscopic sphincterotomy, renal stone treatment, continuous subcutaneous insulin, and laser therapy of the gut), applications of molecular biology (hepatitis B vaccines, genetics, and cancer treatment), new compounds (prostacyclin, free radicals, asymptomatic hypercalcaemia, and the management of poisoning) and neurology (multiple sclerosis, infectious degeneration of the nervous system, myopathic disorders, and migraine).

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Alcohol: Our Favourite Drug: New Report on Alcohol and Alcohol-related Problems from a Special Committee of the Royal College of Psychiatrists. Pp. xii + 213. Tavistock Publications, London, New York, 1986. £6.95 (paperback) £18.00 (hardback).

The first of three reports from Royal Colleges on the topic of alcohol appeared with the approach of the festive season in 1986. Under the chairmanship of Dr Bruce Ritson, the College of Psychiatrists has updated and revised its first report of 1979.

'Our society has chosen to co-exist with a potentially dangerous and addictive drug' and this publication ably and with great clarity, for both the professional and informed layman, examines and makes recommendations about this important issue confronting us.

An easily readable account of the historical and present perspectives of alcohol misuse, together with an overview of

the effects on the individual in terms of the harm, the cost to society, contributing factors in causation, treatment and where responsibilities lie is presented.

The recommendations fall into three categories, namely prevention, treatment and research. In the first, emphasis is made of the change from the report of 1979 in terms of somewhat more stringent levels of consumption, quoting guidelines of 21 units for men and 14 units for women spread throughout a week as representing low risk. Many of the suggestions require an increased Government commitment to instituting measures that will have an effect on improving the nation's health and reducing the harm caused by alcohol, particularly that 'taxation policies should be intentionally employed in the interest of health, to ensure that per capita consumption does not increase beyond the present level, and is by stages brought back to an agreed lower level'. Practical comments are made about advertising, drinking and driving and availability of alcohol.

Treatment recommendations refer to planning of services with roles for both primary health care agencies and specialized services. In addition, a review of the present adequacy of the training of caring professions is suggested. A final remark is made about research funding being commensurate with health and social costs of alcohol misuse.

In conclusion I would commend this publication to doctors, medical students, health workers in the alcohol field and the informed layman.

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Biofeedback and Related Therapies in Clinical Practice, Donald Marcer. Psychology and Medicine Series. Pp. xii + 259, illustrated. Croom Helm, London, Sydney, 1986. £22.50 (hardback), £10.95 (paperback).

Some members of the health profession have perhaps heard of the term biofeedback but most have not heard of it or have only a faint understanding of the subject. It is a fast growing subject with over 500 publications in the last five years and by providing an extensive review the author not only provides a quick introduction to the subject of biofeedback, but also points out its limitations, the extent of the contribution made by other related therapies like relaxation and meditation and its possible application in certain conditions.

As infections caused by single agents are gradually being replaced as important causes of morbidity by multifactorial chronic, often stress-related conditions, continual search for single curative or preventive agents is not only fruitless but may even be dangerous. On the other hand, carefully researched multimodel management approaches are likely to make us clinically more effective.

Part One starts with possible links between stress and disease, goes through the development of biofeedback and