Book Reviews

Annual Review of Public Health. Volume 10, Lester Breslow, Jonathan E. Fielding and Lester B. Lave. Pp vi + 460. Annual Reviews Inc., Palo Alto, California, USA, 1989. \$39.00 (U.S.A. and Canada); \$43.00 (elsewhere).

This form of writing, the annual review, is very much part of the American tradition with two substantial publications in the field of public health appearing each year. The first, the *Epidemiological Reviews* which began in 1979, is published under the editorial management of the *American Journal of Epidemiology* and is sponsored by the Society for Epidemiological Research and the International Epidemiological Association. It is now in its 11th edition and is published by Johns Hopkins University School of Hygiene and Public Health. The second series, the *Annual Review of Public Health*, is published by Annual Review Inc. of Palo Alto, California. It began in 1932 with the publication of the *Annual Review of Biochemistry* and now has 27 different subject titles. The *Annual Review of Public Health* is in its 10th year. Like many of this style of publication, it succeeds as much by the skill of the commissioning committee in choosing the subjects (there are 21 this year), as by the quality of the individual reviews. At the end of each volume is a cumulative chapter index of subjects and it is possible to compare the emphasis of the 10th edition with the previous 9. There is a slightly greater emphasis on health services research, health policy and evaluation (6 chapters) and behavioural science (4) and the usual proportion of chapters on epidemiology and biostatistics (5), environmental and occupational health (4) and disease epidemiology (2).

The chapters of the 10th edition, although topical, form a strange mixture. They are, nevertheless, highly relevant to the public health problems in the United Kingdom. Even chapters dealing with underinsurance and the effect of the Medicare Prospective Payment System are of direct relevance following the British Governments' White Paper. Each chapter brings a critical review by an experienced academic of a body of relevant literature. With nearly 2000 references in all, each report can claim with some justification to represent the 'state of the art'. What is remarkable about the series and that of the *Epidemiological Review* is the demonstration of the breadth and depth of academic public health in the United States.

Since the Acheson Report in 1988, Schools of Public Health are becoming fashionable within the United Kingdom. They bring with them the opportunity to create a critical mass of public health academics and practitioners from many different disciplines. Perhaps it might be possible to envisage a review series from the United Kingdom in another ten years.

S.C. Farrow
Department of Epidemiology
Welsh National School of Medicine
Cardiff CF4 4XN

The Status of the Human Embryo, edited by G.R. Dunstan & M.J. Sellars. Pp 119. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1988. £15.50.

The rapid increase in knowledge in the fields of reproduction and genetics has led to the widespread introduction of new techniques for the treatment of infertility, and the management of genetic disease. These techniques have enabled infertile couples to reproduce, and have allowed individuals carrying harmful genes to embark on pregnancy without fear of having a disabled child. However, while the possibilities opened up by these new techniques may be seen as great medical advances, for many people concerns remain about the ethical aspects of such measures. How can one reconcile respect for human life with measures that may involve the destruction of human embryos?

Too often the ethical debate on these issues has been partisan and ill informed. This book attempts to redress this. The authors are a group drawn from medicine, research, theology and philosophy, all of whom are distinguished in their own fields. They have been meeting regularly under the auspices of the King's Fund for the past ten years, and have spent part of that time in considering and debating fundamental issues on the status of the embryo, and the understanding that comes from considerations of the Greek, Jewish, Christian and Hippocratic traditions that have been formative of western moral viewpoints.

Arising from those discussions the editors have produced this book. There are chapters on the biology of development from conception to fetus and on the medical indications for embryo research. The chapters on the western moral tradition by Gordon Dunstan, the Jewish tradition by Immanuel Jakobovits and on Roman Catholic viewpoints by Brendan Soane are particularly valuable in providing understanding of differing viewpoints on the question of when a human life begins. The book concludes with an analysis from the viewpoint of contemporary philosophy.

The book provides a very useful, informative and thought-provoking review of many of the fundamental ethical issues, and will be of interest both to health care professionals, philosophers and ethicists. While consensus is unlikely over the ethical issues surrounding the use of reproductive technologies, this book will help to ensure that the debate can be both well informed, and the various opposing views understood.

Richard West
Department of Child Health
St George's Hospital Medical School
London SW17 0RE

Digestive Disease Pathology. Volume 1, edited by Shaw Watanabe, Marianne Wolff & Sheldon C. Sommers. Pp 229, illustrated. Macmillan Publishing Company, New York, 1989. £36.00.

It is always useful to consult the preface when considering buying a book and, certainly, before embarking on a book review. Unfortunately, although one is promised in

the contents, there is no preface to this book. Therefore, the reader can only guess at its purpose before turning to the text itself. It is immediately clear that this is not a review of gastrointestinal pathology but, rather, a catholic collection of what seem to be randomly selected topics, not all of which are necessarily representative of the 'advancing edge' of gastroenterology. Nor is the book an up to date source of information on those topics which it does cover. There are only one or two references later than 1985 and, if the chapters on gastrointestinal lymphoma and mucosal immunity are representative, then the book is very dated indeed. The first chapter, which is a somewhat turgid account of differentiation in gastric cancer, accounts for slightly less than a quarter of the entire book; it is written in the style of a scientific paper as is the second on the prognosis of this disease. The style changes to that of a book rather than a journal as chapters follow on a subtype of gastritis, autonomic nerves, lymphoma, neuroendocrine tumours and their cells, protein-losing enteropathy and mucosal immunity. The final chapter on Japanese Crohn's disease is once more presented as a formal scientific paper. I have no doubt that the authors have given their best but the editors have not. They appear to have given little guidance to the authors and to have been in no hurry to get the book into press. Perhaps the missing preface is no idle omission; like this reviewer the editors seem to have been unable to summarize the reasons for producing this volume.

Professor P.G. Isaacson
Department of Morbid Anatomy
University College Hospital
London WC1E 6JJ

Family Problems, Peter R. Williams. Pp viii + 108, illustrated. Oxford University Press, London, New York, Tokyo, 1989. £12.50 softback.

Many general practitioners are 'family doctors' only in name. They more usually act as personal physicians to many individuals, albeit often caring for several branches of the same family. All families experience problems together and sometimes the stresses, say of divorce or bereavement, can cause one member to feel ill and go, or be taken, to the doctor. At times it helps to take a broad view of the whole family when trying to remedy such a situation. Every family possesses its own dynamic and quite small adjustments can produce a valuable reduction of anxiety and an increase in mutual tolerance. Peter Williams' book is about how ordinary doctors can develop their skills in seeing and understanding normal families who have problems. He suggests simple techniques, adapted from systemic family therapy and from marital therapy, that can be used within the setting of general practice. He also discusses the problem of working with other professionals and of sharing and referring cases.

The purpose of the book is to sensitize readers to think in a family context when a patient comes with symptoms that may have started at a time of domestic crisis. It is to encourage doctors to reflect beyond the limits of the consulting room and to try working with couples or whole families when their problems might be appropriately understood that way.

It is a short book, clearly written and presented with some helpful diagrams, tables and illustrations of family trees. It is no handbook to therapy, there are several such works suggested at the end of the text. Rather it is an invitation to doctors to adopt a family-based viewpoint, with some simple and practical suggestions how to go about it. As such, any enthusiastic general practitioner will find it worth perusing, to consider whether to risk developing a worthwhile extension to the more conventional if limited techniques of one-to-one doctoring.

Oliver Samuel
The Pinn Medical Centre
Pinner
Middlesex HA5 1HF

Patient Care in Community Practice. A handbook of non-medical health-care, Robin J. Harman. Pp xvi + 239, illustrated. The Pharmaceutical Press, London, 1989. £10.00.

The author of the book has identified a number of conditions met with in the community and has produced a reference book on the management of these conditions and a guide to the products used in their management. He has drawn from available information and presented it in a very well laid out, easy-to-read, publication. As a pharmacist, he was always being asked his advice by the general public, an experience common to other health professionals working in the community. It is impossible to be an expert in all conditions one meets with, but this book contains a lot of information to assist in providing support for these patients, aimed particularly at doctors, nurses and pharmacists.

A chapter is given to each condition ranging from somatherapy, incontinence, abdominal hernias, use of compression hosiery, wound management, dietary products, oxygen and inhalation therapy, to the more specialist treatments with parenteral nutrition and home dialyses. At the beginning of each chapter is a clear summary followed by a brief introduction to the condition. Each contains clear and helpful diagrams and some pictures illustrating the text and, particularly, the products discussed.

With the exception of dietary products all the other products described demand practical expertise as well as the background theory, so this book cannot replace the practical instruction by experts in their use. However, as a reference book I think this book has achieved what it set out to do: namely, provide well laid out information to form a basis for patient care, and a comprehensive directory of manufacturers and organisations for further advice and information.

Hazel Moore,
District Nursing Officer
East Oxford Health Centre
Oxford OX4 1XD