Book Reviews

Developmental Reflexive Rehabilitation, edited by David J. McGlown. Pp. xi + 251. Taylor & Francis, 1990. £29.95, hardback.

The back cover of this book indicates that this book is an 'up-to-date analysis and critique of thirteen major schools of rehabilitation', is 'a balanced and unbiased view of received knowledge', with 'a detailed description of the treatment modality... he has originated and developed'. This technique, which gives the book its title, is really aimed at the brain injured child (although the author indicates its applicability to adults, this is inadequately developed). The blurb is thus a bit misleading – I suspect that is why I, and not a paediatrician, was chosen to review it!

The book is not well aimed. There is an awful lot of theory and supposition for the practising therapist and it is dreadfully hard to read, partly because of the style of allusion, quotation and circumlocution. One might usefully (and the present writer would consider fairly) in this context quote Le Comte de Buffon: 'Those who write as they speak, even though they speak well, write badly' – which sentence and encapsulated syllogism itself are a parody. Its message is somewhat peripheral to physicians like me who deal with adult brain injury. It is mainly descriptive and, while the author details the difficulty of clinical trials work in this field, his own data do not include long-term follow-up – perhaps because it is too early for there to be any, but we should be told. The author's other problem is that the description of examination findings translates very poorly into the printed word. Having finally ploughed through the book, one needs the film.

There is a mild degree of paranoia evident, also, as is common when innovators face up to the establishment. The author's unit is outside the NHS and he is defensive about this. I don't actually think he needs to be. While the book may not teach the techniques or indeed entirely convince the readership of their validity, the analysis of therapies is comprehensive and the specialist therapist or doctor may be made to think. I will certainly see what our therapists make of it. I only wish that an editor had been set on it before I had to read it.

Andrew Bamji
Clinical Tutor,
Queen Mary's Hospital,
Sidcup,
Kent DA14 6LT

Competition in Health Care: Reforming the NHS, edited by A.J. Culyer, A.K. Maynard & J.W. Posnett. Pp. vii + 250, illustrated. Macmillan Press, Basingstoke, Hampshire, 1990. £14.95, paperback.

Recent changes in the financing and delivery of services in the National Health Service have attracted widespread attention and controversy. This book, prepared when the broad outlines of the reforms were known but before implementation, critically examines the reforms in terms

of the extent to which they are likely to satisfy the objectives of the NHS, particularly efficiency and equity. The book is written from the perspective of economists, but is intended to be of use to anyone with an interest in the financing and delivery of health care.

Despite variation between chapters in the scope, detail and degree of accessibility to non-economists, the book represents a very useful statement on the reforms and their likely advantages and disadvantages. Readers interested in health system design will enjoy particularly the chapter by Williams on ethics, clinical freedom and the doctor's role, which contrasts the government's statement that the objectives of the NHS remain unchanged with the real implications of the reforms. They will also find useful the chapters by Brazier *et al.* on criteria for evaluating the reforms, by Smith on the role of information systems and by Culyer and Posnett on the potential gains from encouraging competition. Readers more interested in the specifics of the changes will find chapters on the implications of the reforms for the private sector (by Propper and Maynard), on resource availability and wage setting and on desirable changes in capital resource management (by Mayston), on the new resource allocation system that replaces RAWP (by Carr-Hill), and on the proposed community care changes (by Wright).

Anne Mills
London School of Economics,
London WC2A 2AE,
and London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine,
London WC1E 7HT.

Medical Aspects of Exercise: Benefits and risks. Report of the Royal College of Physicians. Pp. 33. Royal College of Physicians London, 1991. £7.50, paperback.

The authors are to be congratulated on this excellent book. Noting the formidable talent in the Working Party of the Royal College of Physicians it comes as no surprise to find that the material content is sound, comprehensive and up to date. In addition, however, the presentation is precise and eminently readable.

A concise account of this type is inevitably pedantic in part and yet there is nothing here to take issue with. The references provided are limited but provide a more than adequate starting point for those wishing to pursue some aspects in greater depth.

This book must rank as the best current review of the case for exercise and its effects. It is difficult to imagine any group of doctors who would not benefit from reading this book. For those with any active interest in exercise it is essential. This is a production both to buy and read.

D. Allan
Postgraduate Medical Education Centre,
Furness General Hospital,
Dalton Lane,
Barrow in Furness,
Cumbria LA14 4LF.