This is my desert island book, to be taken with the Bible and Shakespeare! Expensive, perhaps, at first sight, but not when one considers all that it offers. Its objective, states the preface, is to provide 'practising pharmacists and physicians with concise unbiased information on the substances used in medicine and pharmacy'. This 30th edition breaks new records. It contains 5,132 monographs of compounds or groups of compounds. Part I has 69 chapters containing 4,300 drug monographs grouped according to clinical or pharmaceutical use. Part II contains 832 monographs which do not fit in Part I, including investigational drugs, and non-drug substances such as plant materials. Part III consists of proprietary preparations from a range of countries. The index has 153,500 entries.

An innovation in this edition is the inclusion of monographs on treatment of particular conditions, for example, cluster headaches and migraine. Summaries have been added to some drugs which have long monographs of a page or more. There are useful reviews of important drug groups, for example, anti-neoplastic agents and immunosuppressants.

All of this information is supported by references to published work. During 30 years of therapeutic teaching and research, Martindale has been my most-consulted reference book, and this 30th edition will, I know, be very heavily used. No hospital library or pharmacy should be without it.

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Clinical Neurology – A Modern Approach, A. Hopkins. Pp. viii + 486, illustrated. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1993. Paperback, £22.50.

This book is divided into four parts; an introduction to clinical neurology, the basic grammar of neurology, the principal neurological disorders and coping with chronic physical disability. There is no chapter on techniques of neurological examination. The text is displayed in easy to read double columns but there are several irritating typographical errors. The subject matter is well illustrated but some figures, viz. figure 15.4, are confusing unless one is a member of MENSA. The many black and white reproductions of angiograms, MRI and CT scans are mainly of high quality. The choice of references at the end of each chapter is somewhat idiosyncratic and there is no mention at all of definitive works on diseases of voluntary muscle or peripheral nerve.

Most practising neurologists would be dismayed to see lesions of the frontal lobes dismissed in half a page and disorders of the autonomic nervous system discussed in fewer than two pages.

I was particularly disappointed with the chapter on brain tumours which contains inaccuracies, errors and omissions too numerous to mention in a short review and I feel that an added chapter on the molecular biology of nervous disorders would have been invaluable.

In summary I found this textbook, like the proverbial curate's egg, good in parts, but I fear that in its present

format it is unlikely to pose much of a threat to its competitors most of which through careful editing and revision have stood the test of time.

Sadly, I do not think that this textbook in its present form will find a place on the bookshelves of senior neurologists or other neuroscientists.

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Community Health, Preventive Medicine and Social Services, 6th edition, B. Meredith Davies and T. Davies. Pp. xiii + 570, illustrated. Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch, London, 1993. Paperback, £14.95.

This book is aimed at general practitioner trainees and other members of the primary health care team. It seeks to cover an enormous range of topics, ranging from the organization of the NHS through the epidemiology of specific diseases to the care of disadvantaged groups in the community. Unfortunately, it has become a victim of the rapidly changing political environment of recent years. Although extensively revised, it has failed to incorporate fully many of the recent changes in British health and social services. In many cases, a new development is described in one place but the old system remains elsewhere. For example, the chapter on the organization of the NHS, 'Working for Patients' is described in some detail but it is followed by a detailed description of the pre-reform system. The same is true for 'Care in the Community' and the section on hospital information.

In general the book is very traditional, limiting itself to descriptions rather than explanations. This may be what examination candidates want but it leads to a rather simplistic approach. Prevention is very much preventative medicine, ignoring the wider context of social policy. Where preventative medicine has a limited role in promoting health, such as for many of the conditions in the chapter entitled 'Epidemiology and Prevention of Non-communicable Disease', it is ignored.

This simple approach gives rise to many problems as the authors attempt to simplify complex issues. This leads to, for example, confusion between audit and evaluation. Many of the statements about screening and other preventive interactions ignore the uncertainty about their effectiveness.

This book was first published 27 years ago. Since then, the organization of health services and approaches to prevention have become much more complex and the pace of change is accelerating. Perhaps by attempting to condense all of this into a 500 page book the authors have set themselves an impossible task.

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