

questions and space for written answers. Clearly, those interested in palliative care and who enjoy such an approach will respond enthusiastically to the appearance of the first unit in a new series. I was not clear, however, as to the target audience. Reference is made to the whole team but this guide seems to be focused more narrowly on medical needs.

The Open Learning Guide comes in two parts – one about pain management and the other ‘five whole patient case studies’. The main text is written by two doctors; the case studies compiled by five others. The authors’ decision to abandon the WHO three-step analgesic ladder and to minimize the place of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs casts doubt on the general applicability of this learning aid.

The whole series is the combined creation of a hospice medical director, director of studies, nurse tutor and an expert in open learning. Each of the five planned guides will, presumably, cost £33. A sixth, about the management of lymphoedema, is also promised before the end of 1994. Further guides are planned for bimonthly publication thereafter and will include two for relatives, three on teaching methods, two on more advanced pain and symptom management, and one on hospice management. Clearly innovative and based on considerable expertise and enthusiasm, only time will tell whether they will gain a permanent niche in the educational market.

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**Radiology and Imaging for Medical Students.** D. Sutton. Pp. 270, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, London, New York, Edinburgh, Tokyo, 1994. Paperback, £17.50.

Any book that brings radiology to the attention of the student is to be welcomed as formal exposure to the subject in most medical schools is limited. This book is one of a series that covers the subject from student level to the consultant radiologist. The physical basis of X-rays, ultrasound, CT and MRI are well described in the first chapter. Subsequent chapters consider the various systems of the body and the book finishes with a section on interventional radiology. Most sections start with a list of possible radiological investigations followed by a description of various diseases. The need for a systematic approach when viewing a radiograph is emphasized in the chest section and this helps to avoid guessing at a diagnosis rather than analysing the signs.

The text generally covers most topics well, although the relative importance of some of the older investigations is rather over-emphasized. For instance most radiologists would normally perform CT of the chest to identify nodes rather than a barium swallow.

Radiology is a study of images and the illustrations in the book are generally good, although some would benefit from an accompanying line drawing particularly for a student audience. Some MRI images are included but one or two of the ultrasound images are looking a little old.

The book itself fits neatly into the pocket of a student’s white coat, is a useful introduction to radiology and will

hopefully encourage the student to take a further interest in imaging.

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**Advances in Pineal Research, Volume 7,** edited by G.J.M. Maestroni, A. Conti and R.J. Reiter. Pp. 306, illustrated. John Libbey, London, Paris, Rome, 1994. Paperback, £32.50.

The pineal has been subject to intense debate, and more recently research, from the time of Descartes onwards. While we appear to have moved on a little from the location of the seat of the soul in the pineal, this small midline organ remains enigmatic. Its detailed biochemistry and neurochemistry has been thoroughly explored, but physiologically, other than some form of involvement in reproductive seasonality and breeding, its precise role is essentially unknown. This is particularly true in humans. Nevertheless, the intense research continues, and the present volume represents the results of a recent symposium which is published in the ‘Advances in Pineal Research’ series. This particular volume addresses itself to the relationship between the pineal and the immune system, with particular reference to cancer. It seems only a matter of time before the pineal gets a look in to the burgeoning field of neuroimmunomodulation, and this present volume is full of fascinating studies from the major players in this area. For a symposium publication, the book is remarkably well printed and publication as a paperback has also led to a relatively low price. While clearly addressed to experts within this field, this particular volume will be extremely useful to anyone wishing to explore this particular area of pineal research.

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**MCQ Practice Papers,** P.G. Elliot. Pp. 181. Pastest, Cheshire, 1993. Paperback, £12.50.

The multiple-choice question paper is the part of the examination for membership of the Royal College of General Practitioners which engenders the most anxiety and pessimism amongst candidates. To many the task of preparing for what appears to be a test of global knowledge seems impossible. Advice as to how to do so comes in all shapes and sizes but always includes exhortations to practice with past questions.

The RCGP protects its pool of questions, so originals are not available unless you have member friends with photographic memories. This book, however, provides five complete mock examinations written by a current

examiner in the format used in the real thing with the addition of check boxes to tempt you to commit your ticks to paper as you go along. With 1,800 different questions this is quite a feast for the practice hungry. Answers are provided separately with useful explanatory notes which means you really can learn by your mistakes. Inevitably occasional minor ambiguities are to be found but, on the whole, the questions are clear and the answers reasonable.

The introduction also provides helpful background on the structure and marking system used by the examiners plus of course the author's own tips on preparation and technique. This is the first such book I have seen since the MCQ paper underwent a major revision in 1992, and should be a valuable resource for anyone preparing for the examination and maybe with reaccreditation for principals looming on the horizon, sales might turn out better than the publishers ever dreamt!

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**The Trainee's Companion to General Practice**, edited by J. Rosenthal, J. Naish and M. Lloyd. Pp. 301, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, London, Edinburgh, New York, Tokyo, 1993. Hardback, £19.95.

This worthy multi-author book tries hard to introduce the trainee to the art and science of general practice early on in the training year. There are chapters on organization, the consultation, communication, prevention and research – all of which provide insight into these areas for the trainee. The last two chapters provide useful guides on audit and the MRCGP.

The book is hampered in its comprehensiveness by the non-uniformity of styles that inevitably accompanies a set of essays, as well as by a patchy approach which left me wanting to add extra details for completeness.

Although the book is full of 'discussion point' areas which could be focal points for tutorials, some of the essays do not fit into the trainee year plan very well. I particularly enjoyed John Horder's chapter on 'Health not Illness', though I find it hard to see how it fits in with the rest of the book and its remit.

The section on organization is worthy, inevitably out of date in some respects, and difficult to get fired up about. This is one of the most tedious things that trainees must learn and Steve Brant's approach is fair and factual rather than enthusiastic. The flow diagrams and appendices are poorly explained and could be difficult for some trainees to follow without their tutor sitting alongside them.

This is not a trainee's companion as it is not comprehensive enough. It is a useful book for the trainer to own and give the trainee for use as a tutorial feeder. More for the practice library than the individual trainee.

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**Quality in Primary Health Care, Report of a Meeting held on 13th October, 1993**, Royal Society of Medicine, London, 1993.

Essentially a series of essays, this report will not answer all of these questions but it certainly provides several insights into the cutting edge of quality in primary health care.

The meeting was organized by the NHS Management Executive (as was) at the Royal Society of Medicine. Speakers, many of them are key figures in the development of quality in primary care, range through all aspects of primary health care. This means the report gives a particularly wide overview of what is happening and, more importantly, the possibilities for future development in improving the quality of services. I was particularly interested to read Jill Pitkeathley's consumer perspective covering issues we often forget but that are vital to the effective delivery of health care. I was particularly encouraged to read of the partnership developing in some areas between FHSAs and practices, the former realizing that many practices need time and some external support to help them realize their potential.

This then is a short (only 35 pages) but useful report of current developments in improving quality in primary health care. In his contribution, Dr Donald Irvine comments that quality is 'in the eye of the beholder'. The widespread dissemination of this report would open many eyes to wider possibilities. I recommend it to all primary health care teams and those involved in managing this service.

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**New Drugs**, 3rd Edition, edited by J. Feely. Pp. 448, illustrated. BMJ, London, 1994. Paperback £17.95.

In compiling a broad collection of topics that first appeared as review articles in the *British Medical Journal*, Professor Feely has marshalled 31 co-authors to help him update and revise each topic for this publication. The first six chapters cover general aspects of clinical pharmacology and therapeutics (drug handling and response, therapeutic drug monitoring and clinical trials, adverse drug reactions and interactions, and prescribing for children and the elderly) with admirable thoroughness and clarity. The authors of later chapters would have done well to read this early section before putting pen to paper. A chapter on drugs in pregnant and breastfeeding women would have been a useful addition to this introductory section. The remaining 25 chapters cover recent developments in every section of the formulary. The standard varies. Some attest to light revision and cite no references later than 1987, while in others, the involvement of an additional co-author has led to a totally fresh approach. Some chapters are referenced comprehensively, while others merely end with a list of articles for further reading. The most striking variation is the amount of trouble taken by authors to set new drugs in context. The best not only advise on drug selection but