

## Book reviews

**The AIDS virus: forecasting its impact.** (Pp 59; £1.00) London: Office of Health Economics, 1986.

**Future trends in AIDS: Report of a seminar organised by DHSS.** (Pp 114; £6.70) London: HMSO, 1987.

“The AIDS virus” provides a brief but comprehensive background to the problem of AIDS, with useful tables bringing together information from different countries. Since December 1986 the number of cases has increased and the place of zidovudine (formerly AZT) has become more clearly established, but despite these shortcomings this book is one of the best summaries for any student who has not kept up with the Journals.

“Future trends in AIDS” is more interesting. Reports of seminars often make dull reading but this is an exception. It is a well presented and fascinating series of essays on the epidemiology of AIDS. As Professor Healy comments in his summing up, we do not yet have the information to assess the reliability of long term forecasting models. Current estimates of the mean incubation period of AIDS are of the order of eight years or more, so we do not yet know what proportion of HIV-positive people will develop AIDS. Numerically in the UK the main epidemics are in male homosexuals and intravenous drug abusers, and we have a great deal of information about both groups. But when it comes to the heterosexual population, we know almost nothing. Only five cases appear to have acquired the infection heterosexually in the UK and they had all had intercourse with a partner in a high risk group, and in one case also shared razors with drug abusers. HIV-positive people appear to be particularly liable to pass on the infection early in the disease and in the latest phase, so the risks of contact will vary over time as well as with actual sexual habits. Clearly we have a lot to learn about AIDS.

“Future trends in AIDS” brings together many relevant facts and also a number of theories which are useful in defining present policy. Some will need amending as our understanding of this disease improves, but for the moment this is an invaluable source book for those who have to advise the public on this horrendous epidemic.

A M B GOLDING

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**Domiciliary Terminal Care. A Handbook for Doctors and Nurses.** Ed: Derek Doyle (Pp 130; £6.95) Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone, 1987

Despite the fact that about two thirds now die either in hospital or hospice, most people spend a substantial part of their final illness at home under the care of their family, general practitioner and district nurse. As this excellent book points out it is therefore at home that most of the problems and challenges are met. It falls to the members of the primary health care team to anticipate some of these problems and treat others. It is to them that relatives will turn, not only whilst the patient is still alive, but also in the months and years which follow.

To provide effective care for a dying patient and close support to the family is one of the most rewarding aspects of family practice. To do this properly now demands considerable technical knowledge and skill. This book therefore is very welcome because it provides vital information in an authoritative, concise and sensible way. Especially valuable are the sections on pain control, symptom control and emergencies in terminal care. The lessons learned from the hospice movement are essential to primary care, and an understanding of how pain can be effectively relieved is one of the most important contributions. Every General Practitioner and trainee must know about these techniques. The book describes them excellently. Much else is also good—the discussions on communication, team work, spiritual needs and bereavement. If anything, more could have been written about understanding and coping with the needs of the relatives and immediate carers as in the end it is they who carry the complete burden. However, the handbook can be strongly commended and every practice should have a copy on its bookshelves.

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**Progress in Child Health: Volume 3.** Ed: Macfarlane JA. (Pp 237; £20.00) Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone, 1987

A reasonable complaint at about the time the Court Report on the future of child health services was published was the lack of a literature which described the contemporary content and skills of these services. Available textbooks tended to be mechanistic in flavour and often failed to convey the complexity and need for evolutionary change that are features of

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community-based services for children. In the decade since, the problem has been corrected in a number of ways; this is the third of a series of books of essays which have made a significant contribution to awareness of the scope and content of the health care of children.

As with the earlier volumes, the diversity of this new collection is attractive for two reasons. Firstly, because it illustrates the combination—or interaction—of epidemiological, clinical and organisational matters that are all a part of good practice. Secondly, because this approach makes it possible to set appraisals of the present need for well-established activities (for example, screening for congenital dislocation of the hip or immunisation policies) alongside topics of more recent concern or interest. In this volume, six essays are about what might loosely be called the psychosocial needs of children and reflect a growing interest in questions of this kind.

This is not a text book nor do the essays attempt a formal review of the literature on a particular topic. Each of the 18 chapters is short, and all are by people who know their business, so that the book as a whole contributes to an informed view of the present agenda of child health practice. By and large the chapters are well referenced and offer a way into the literature of different topics. Like its predecessors, this collection will be of value to all with a concern for child health, whether as practitioners or as managers. Its editor is to be commended not simply for a good idea but for the standard that the series has achieved thus far.

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**Screening for cancer of the uterine cervix.** Eds: Hakama M, Miller AB, Day NE. (Pp 311; £25.00) Lyon: IARC Scientific Publications no.76, 1986

This book is the result of collaboration between the IARC (International Agency for Research on Cancer) and the UICC (International Union Against Cancer). The first half of the book presents the efforts of the IARC working group on the evaluation of cervical cancer screening programmes. Eleven chapters describe studies of screening programmes as conducted in eight countries over a period of 20 years. The results of these studies are summarised by the working group and the conclusions that may be drawn from the results presented with their implications for formulating screening policy.

The second half of the book presents the content of a UICC Workshop on screening for cancer of the cervix held in Lyon November 1984. A series of 10 papers describe aspects of screening programme organisation including a chapter referring to the particular requirements for programmes in developing countries. The final two chapters of the section refer to screening for cancer of the endometrium and cancer of the ovary.

The 300 pages which comprise this publication are an excellent source of information and reference on both the epidemiological basis for evaluation of screening policies and the organisational requirements for successful programmes. The book is, therefore, worthy of priority attention of epidemiologists and those charged with advising on and implementing effective screening programmes. For the former group the book will both stimulate and satisfy; for the latter group it may in turn both stimulate and frustrate since the already accepted prerequisites of successful screening programmes are once more described, and the reasons for deficiencies in achievement underlined.

In conclusion, this volume is an excellent investment for both academic and service departments of Community Medicine and for individuals with a particular responsibility for or interest in screening for cancer of the uterine cervix.

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**Public health and human ecology.** Ed: John M Last. (Pp 404; £13.95) Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall International Editions, 1987.

When a new book is presented we should ask ourselves why it has been written and what new knowledge or new approach to the subject is being offered. In the preface we are clearly told that this volume is intended for medical students and health professionals who should be looking ahead to the new situations and problems of the 21st Century. It avowedly raises questions that are left unanswered and is a personal statement of priorities. It covers an enormous amount of ground and seeks to address the big issues of health, from infectious killers in the developing world to pollution, war and murder in the developed.

The book starts with a useful definition of community health and goes on to a very long chapter on epidemiology, which I felt was just another statement of old ground, and which would be better understood by looking at a well tried text. One was frequently told to “consult a larger textbook”—and