

**Advanced Course in Nutrition and Lifestyle**, Bilthoven, The Netherlands, 30 May–5 June 1994. For further information: The Wageningen Centre for Nutrition and Epidemiology, fao Esther G M Pallast, Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, Agricultural University, PO Box 238, 6700 AE Wageningen, The Netherlands; tel: +31 8370 84124; fax: +31 8370 82782.

**Fourth Summer Course in Biostatistics**, Vellore, India, 13 June–1 July 1994. Five intensive, application oriented, three week courses – (a) introduction to biostatistics and hospital statistics; (b) epidemiological methods and analysis; (c) PC based statistical software in health care; (d) applied multivariate techniques; and (e) demographic analyses and their biostatistical application – organised jointly by: Department of Biostatistics, CMC, Vellore and Epidemiology and Health Management Network of India (EPIDMAN). For further information: Secretary, Department of Biostatistics, Christian Medical College, Vellore 632002, India. Tel: (416) 22603 ext 4205. Fax: (416) 25035/22103/22788.

**Fifth International Symposium on Hypertension in the Community**, Tel Aviv, Israel, 11–14 December 1994. For further information: The Secretariat, Fifth International Symposium on Hypertension in the Community, PO Box 50006, Tel Aviv 61500, Israel; tel: +972 3 5140014; fax: +972 3 5175674/660325.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

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**Childless No Choice: The Experience of Involuntary Childlessness.** By James H Monach. (Pp 294; £40.00.) London: Routledge, 1993. ISBN 0-415-04090-6.

The aim of this book is to improve the understanding of the experience of infertility and of factors associated with the decision to seek treatment. The research, conducted by a social worker, has three elements: a survey of 30 couples attending a specialist infertility clinic (with interviews at three points in time over a period of four and a half years); a general practice survey of 2388 residents of a public housing estate; and a survey of 133 general practitioners for information on the incidence, causes, and management of infertility in their practices.

The literature on psychological, psychiatric, and socio-emotional impacts of infertility is reviewed. Appendices provide a glossary of medical terms, discussions of normal reproduction, the process of the infertility investigation, and fertility problems.

The published reports suggest a sizeable population of the “hidden childless”, with only one in three couples seeking and receiving specialist evaluation of difficulties with fertility. The study also provides evidence of the existence of a dominant ideology which stresses the primacy of the woman’s responsibility for infertility investigation, reflected particularly in the lack of involvement of men in the investigation and treatment

processes. Gender differences are also noted in the reported personal distress associated with infertility.

Despite the small sample size, a strength of the book is its use of repeated observations of the couples over time. This enables the author to make distinctions between the observed effects of infertility, of childlessness, and also of the infertility investigation itself.

Several important practice issues are identified through the research. The study notes a general lack of preparedness of the couples for investigation, particularly in terms of their understanding of the relevant reproductive and fertility facts. The experience of treatment in the clinic as a series of encounters rather than a coordinated process of treatment is also noted. The current widespread practice of lengthy use of temperature charts as an investigative tool is questioned in light of the distress noted in couples. Ethical issues are also addressed, especially the encouragement of continuing treatment in the face of ever-diminishing chances of a pregnancy.

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**Risk factors for Cardiovascular Disease in Non-Smokers.** Eds Donald F Weetman and Diana Wood (Pp 150; Sf 148.) Basel: Karger, 1993. ISBN 3-8055-5682-9.

This book is based on the transcripts of a workshop organised by the School of Health Sciences, University of Sunderland in 1991. The workshop participants addressed an ambitious agenda, a critical review of current epidemiological data on cardiovascular disease (CVD) in non-smokers combined with a discussion of pathophysiological mechanisms. The book is targeted somewhat broadly at “all physicians, health educationalist and advisors”, though not (for reasons which may become obvious) at epidemiologists. The workshop brought together a distinguished panel of contributors and it is clear that many of the presentations were lucid, comprehensive, and entertaining. It is equally clear, however, that the proceedings fell far short of the ambitious aims.

I was immediately irritated by the publisher’s synopsis in which we are told that epidemiology is “not especially suited to the task” of evaluating environmental factors in cardiovascular disease such as diet and lack of exercise. This woolly generalisation encapsulates the book’s inept critique of the epidemiological method in the elucidation of the causes of CVD in populations. We are presented in the table of contents with a facile distinction between “intrinsic” and “environmental” risk factors for cardiovascular disease. Diabetes, “syndrome X”, and hypertension are characterised as intrinsic factors, and in the closing section, in which Professor Weetman reviews the day’s deliberations, we are told that for factors such as a predisposition to diabetes “the die is cast at birth . . . we have to accept our fate; nothing can be done to reduce the risk . . .”. Somewhat more alarmingly, by the closing section (which includes a jaded diatribe on the traditional paternalistic approach to health education) the “intrinsic” factors have become “immutable” and the list of factors now

includes poverty. In a number of chapters the “weakness” of epidemiological evidence is emphasised, though clearly the issues of precision and validity of measurement are equally relevant in laboratory science.

How does one take seriously a book that purports to address risk factors for CVD in non-smokers, which merely excludes cigarette smoking from the deliberations but does not in fact focus on non-smokers as a separate group; a book with separate sections on carbon monoxide and lead exposure but not on obesity, alcohol intake, or on cardiovascular disease in women. The chapter on environmental tobacco smoke is particularly weak. We are told that “properly conducted” case-control studies should be matched on all conceivable confounders and for reasons best known to the author, diabetes and family history of CVD are listed as potential confounders in the current data.

In the penultimate chapter, “chronic disease epidemiology has reached the end of the road . . . the best it can do is to suggest hypotheses which can then be pursued in the molecular biological field”. Epidemiologists may shut down their mainframes, the genes for poverty are surely on the next rung of the double helix.

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**Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome: Biological, Medical, Social and Legal Issues.** By Gerald J Stine. (Pp 462; no price stated.) New Jersey, USA: Prentice Hall, 1993. ISBN 0-13-019811-0.

This textbook reviews important aspects related to HIV infection. It would be suitable for students in health care or related fields as well as anyone who professionally comes into contact with issues surrounding HIV infection. It is primarily based on the USA experience, although many issues discussed are also relevant elsewhere. Each chapter starts with a list of “chapter concepts” and ends with up to 20 “review” questions, the answers to which are provided at the end of the book. The layout of each chapter is clear, with separate illustrative case reports or examples which graphically illustrate the dilemmas faced by patients and clinicians.

The 14 chapters cover basic immunology issues and the pathology of the human immunodeficiency virus; opportunistic infections and their treatment or prevention; clinical indicators of HIV infection and AIDS; therapy for HIV infection; the epidemiology and transmission of HIV and possible strategies to prevent transmission; prevalence of HIV infection both inside and outside the USA; issues surrounding testing for HIV; and social, economic, and legal aspects related to HIV infection and AIDS.

The book is written by one author, and in attempting to cover such a broad range of issues it is inevitable that errors or misinformation have crept in. In fact, the book is already somewhat out of date: In a fast changing field (especially in therapy, interventions, risk factors for transmission and knowledge about the virus and natural history) this is perhaps unavoidable. The writing is rather condescending in places and the