

## Book Reviews

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**Alcohol and Alcoholism: The Report of a Special Committee of the Royal College of Psychiatrists.** London: Tavistock Publications. 1979. Paperback £1.95. Hardback £5.95.

Coming at a time when the Royal College of Psychiatrists is beginning to reconsider its possible role in relation to the news media, the publication of this important book on alcohol and its problems represents a valuable public relations exercise. It has of course already received much publicity in the national press. As a result, some intelligent laymen who had previously had only the vaguest or no knowledge about the College now recognise its role as a robust organization. The book makes a similar weighty impact to that achieved by the publication of *Smoking and Health* by the Royal College of Physicians of London in 1962.

In a lucid foreword Sir Martin Roth pinpoints the hypocrisy of governments which have 'strong economic reasons for keeping alive the myth that alcohol is needed for health and strength'. The Special Committee, chaired by Professor Griffith Edwards, does not however adopt a puritanical stance in regard to alcohol and rightly avers that most people continue to use this drug wisely and well. At the same time they draw attention to the growing minority who abuse alcohol and develop personal, social or health problems. They treat the subject with a fine flow of the pen and give due weight to the broad spectrum of alcohol-related problems as well as the fully established alcohol dependence syndrome.

The Committee's report underlines the relevance of the increasing consumption of alcohol by the whole population to the serious rise in alcohol abuse. This argument is supported by per capita alcohol consumption figures over the past quarter-century. The 'consumption hypothesis' had of course been generated originally in the early 1970's by De Lint and Schmidt of Toronto and it now seems that the factor of alcohol availability is of marked importance and that some psychiatrists in the past understandably over-emphasized personality factors in alcoholism.

The present magnitude of the problem is vividly described. Supporting statistics are provided, e.g. that at least 300,000 persons in the United Kingdom have a serious drinking problem and that alcoholic

admissions to psychiatric hospitals have increased 25-fold over the past 25 years. The report wisely indicates that preventive action may be even more important than treatment. It is suggested that an intake of four pints of beer a day, or four doubles of spirits, or one standard-sized bottle of wine constitutes a reasonable guideline for the upper limit of drinking. If this statement is not entirely accurate, it is certainly the kind of good rough generalization which the authors feel should stimulate critical debate about safe drinking.

Above all, the Committee pleads that people with drinking problems are very much 'of us' and are not to be rejected as a strange, abhorrent and disgraced minority. Society cannot opt out of the problem, leaving its solution to doctors and social workers. This significant book should have a wide appeal—to the psychiatrist, general physician, family practitioner, social worker, nurse and layman.

A. BALFOUR SCLARE, *Consultant Psychiatrist,  
Royal Infirmary and Duke Street Hospital, Glasgow*

**The Diagnosis and Treatment of Alcoholism. Second Edition.** By GARY G. FORREST. Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas. 1978. Pp 348. £17.50, \$12.95 (paperback).

The subject matter of this book has been presented by many authors over recent years.

Dr Forrest's second edition summarizes clearly the behavioural techniques applicable in the treatment of alcoholism. The chapters on marital and family therapy appearing for the first time in this edition direct the reader's attention to the need for a wider perspective in the assessment and treatment of the alcoholic. The author conveys throughout the text his sincerity and devotion to the treatment needs of the alcoholic. The importance of sincerity for successful therapy is clear, and the chapters on self disclosure, group therapy and duration of treatment, later confirmed in a section on clinical studies, establish those factors as contributing to a successful outcome in treatment. The somewhat verbose chapters on the alcoholic's power fantasies and erotic experiences marginally detract from a book which is thought