

**The Psychiatry of Late Life.** Edited by RAYMOND LEVY and FELIX POST. Oxford: Blackwell Scientific. 1982. Pp 297. £15.50.

This book should prove a significant publication in an area of increasing importance. A number of well-known contributors have produced a comprehensive textbook. Unlike many such works it manages to avoid repetition; also to present a comfortable blend of styles. Two chapters on the pathology of the ageing brain and the psychology of ageing occupy one third of the book. This proportion may reflect the editors' view of how far these subjects have been neglected in the past. The remainder of the text is a comprehensive review of modern clinical practice including chapters on organisation of service and community care. Each author provides an extensive list of references. Post's own comments not only reflect his substantial contribution to research in the field but also offers practical advice in dealing with the elderly patient. It is to be hoped that a less expensive clothback edition may be forthcoming since this book deserves to be widely read.

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**Psychosocial Aspects of Nuclear Developments: Report of the Task Force of the American Psychiatric Association.** Washington D.C. 1982. Pp 96. \$12.00.

Descriptions of the consequences of nuclear weapons follow a standard pattern—detailed and thoroughly referenced physics, followed by rather more speculative estimates of the casualties caused by the heat, blast and radiation, and ending rather lamely with a couple of sentences hazarding a few guesses about the psychological sequelae. In one sense this is hardly surprising—the most appropriate data come from Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and it was a long time before either survivors or outsiders got around to documenting what was by then history. Thus, the survivor syndrome is rather better understood than the fear, denial and desolation which occurred at the time of the nuclear attack.

In other ways though, the lack of a substantial psychological literature is unexpected, especially as psychiatrists figure prominently in the international medical movements to prevent nuclear war. The American Psychiatric Association are to be congratulated on their initial attempt to fill the gap. Indeed, as well as providing a summary of the psychosocial sequelae of a nuclear strike, they offer some tentative ideas in three other important areas.

First, Jerome Frank and Rita Rogers each write about the psychology of the arms race, justifying this as important territory for psychiatrists. For example, the USA and USSR are seen as in a conflicted relationship, which would benefit from a modified version of marriage guidance. Second, Michael Mufson discusses the reactions of Harrisburg people to the Three Mile accident, showing that many of the predictions in earlier theoretical work were validated—and also documenting a substantial disaffection with a government which allowed this to happen.

Third, William Beardslee and John Mack present their preliminary findings of a survey of high school students. This appeared to show that children were “deeply disturbed” about nuclear weapons and nuclear power, and yet still accepted the need for war, and even its inevitability.

The authors end by highlighting two issues—the difficulty in contemplating such threatening subjects and the consequent limitations on informed public debate, and the role of health professionals “to strive to prevent” a nuclear holocaust. Even if you disagree with these sentiments, the book is still worth reading.

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**Sex Therapy Handbook: A Clinical Manual for the Diagnosis and Treatment of Sexual Disorders.** By ERIC C. KROHNE. Lancaster: MTP Press. 1982. Pp 100. £10.25.

There are no fewer than 211 headings listed at the beginning of this manual that contains only 90 pages of script. It is a densely written, cheap, no frills text intended for the clinician already active and knowledgeable in the field. There are no introductions or background to the author (a pity), very few illustrations, the cheapest of offset printing and a mile-long list of errata enclosed.

However, when teaching recently, it seemed to me an immensely useful distillation of current thinking and practice. Of particular help were the distinctive diagnostic procedures required during sexual history taking, medical evaluation and psychiatric/psychological evaluation. The author also clearly delineates the practices of sex counselling, psychotherapy and specific sex therapy, on practical as well as theoretical grounds, thus avoiding a pedantic and irrelevant classification for clinicians. In addition there are brief but up-to-date evaluations of treatment with nicely straightforward references and very adequate bibliography.

This manual does not attempt to compete with the classical contributions of Master and Johnson or Kaplan, but needs to be seen as a useful little adjunct to them.

Moderately cheap and moderately recommended.

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**Stress and Human Health: Analysis and Implications of Research.** Edited by GLEN R. ELLIOTT and CARL EISDORFER. New York: Springer Publishing. 1982. Pp 372. \$34.95.

In July 1979, the Office of Science and Technology Policy, an Executive Office of the President of the United States, requested from the National Academy of Sciences' Institute of Medicine a "definition of research issues, delineation of desirable and adverse aspects of stress in its various forms, and biomedical, behavioral and sociological approaches to the description and alleviation of excessive stresses". This mammoth task was undertaken by panels of distinguished researchers who compiled the present report. In it, conceptual issues underlying stress research and critically examined, as are specific topics including stress and life events, stress in "organizational settings" such as school and work, biological substrates of stress, and the relationship of stress to physical and mental illnesses.

First the bad news. Complications by panels of experts do not lend themselves to elegant prose. Apart from a stimulating, erudite and highly literate introduction by David Hamburg, this densely worded report is difficult to read. Particularly heavy going is the chapter on stress in organizational settings which is peppered with statements of the obvious heavily disguised in opaque sociological jargon. Much worse, however, are statements of the obvious which are the result of pointless and cruel animal experiments: that "animals exposed to inescapable shock were more fearful than were those exposed to escapable shock" is the glaringly obvious conclusion cited (p 229) as if it represented a significant advance in knowledge. In most of these experiments, the stressors inflicted on animals are so severe that they are in no way comparable to stressful human conditions except, perhaps, those pertaining in concentration camps. To draw conclusions about human stress from such experiments is unwarranted, and this kind of research cannot be justified on either scientific or ethical grounds.

But when the authors consider human studies, much valuable and informative material is presented. The discussion of conceptual issues in stress research is

admirably lucid, as are the chapters on psychosocial factors, on biological mediating mechanisms, and on stress and illness. A wide range of topics is covered in this book. Its most important function is to stimulate relevant research by identifying fruitful areas of enquiry. In this respect, *Stress and Human Health* succeeds admirably.

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**Psychiatry 1982: Annual Review.** Edited by LESTER GRINSPOON. Washington: American Psychiatric Association. 1982. Pp 539. \$38.50.

This is the first volume of a projected annual review series and covers five topical subjects: sexual dysfunction, schizophrenia, childhood depression, law and psychiatry, and borderline and narcissistic personality disorders.

It is difficult to select chapters for special mention as the general standard is so high but I found the following of particular interest. Virginia Sadock's balanced "overview" of the treatment of psychosexual dysfunctions is very helpful, especially for the non-expert, and the chapters by Levay on problem cases and by Dickes on medical and surgical aspects contain much useful clinical advice.

In the section on schizophrenic disorders there are comprehensive reviews of genetic and biochemical research which cannot be seriously faulted and Liberman's review of social factors is quite the best I have read. The review of pharmacology by John Davis and others contains very clear tabular summaries of all relevant work on such drugs as propranolol and naloxone. However, the authors of *The Psychotherapy of the Schizophrenic Disorders* complain about their "isolation from those espousing other therapeutic strategies" and "growing defensiveness in the writings of psychotherapy advocates". They offer a full discussion of the various reasons for this predicament but do little to advance their cause.

In his introduction to "Depression in Childhood and Adolescence" Henry Work states that "in our litigious climate, patients are much more aware of the diagnostic labels affixed to them". The section is generally most concerned with diagnostic research and there is a full discussion of the nosological concept of childhood depression (or is it depression in childhood?) but the clinical relevance is also stressed. In the review of psycho-biological correlates it is shown that neuroendocrine results (growth hormone and cortisol) tend to validate both the existence of pre-pubertal major depression and its similarity to adult depression. Poznanski writes entertainingly on the clinical charac-