

more practical sections of the book devoted to clinical management. In specific chapters, such as those dealing with pathology, physiology, immunology and pharmacology, the specialist contributors maintain a uniformly high standard. Inevitably there is some repetition—especially in the chapters on therapy—but the advice is generally so sound that it bears repeating.

To avoid interrupting the flow, referencing has been deliberately avoided and each chapter is followed by a short list of further reading; while this is appropriate for the more individual opinions in the sections on management, I found the absence of references detracted from such otherwise authoritative reviews as those of physiology and occupational asthma. There are few gaps, but the brief mention of analgesic-induced asthma might be expanded to include the frequently associated sensitivity to tartrazine—a ubiquitous colouring agent lurking in many tablets, whose possible effects should be known to all doctors prescribing for patients with asthma.

Estimates of the prevalence of asthma range as high as 4 per cent of the population. Of course in hospital practice our attitudes are biased by seeing only the more severely affected patients. Might one perhaps suggest that psychiatrists, seeing an even more selected group of patients, tend to overestimate the importance of psychological factors? Most non-psychiatrists who treat asthma (of whom your reviewer is one) will readily admit (as indeed will most patients) that emotional factors can provoke or exacerbate an attack, but they will resist the idea that the emotions play a major aetiological role in other than the occasional patient. But, as one of the editors of this book says in discussing the role of the psyche: 'Patients, relatives, clinicians and scientists engaged in this controversy usually base their arguments on views that cannot be proved and hold to their opinions with the conviction that only ignorance can sustain'. The chapter on psychiatric aspects (by Dr S. I. Cohen) gave, to a non-psychiatrist, an interesting review of psychological influences on the airways (again the lack of references was frustrating), but I found the argument that absence of allergy was evidence in favour of psycho-pathology unconvincing.

In summary, I would strongly recommend this book to anyone interested in asthma, but those who regard asthma as primarily psychosomatic may find some lack of sympathy towards their views. Of all the chapters, perhaps the last (and shortest) should be the most widely read. Although entitled 'Role of the family doctor in management', it should be read by any doctor treating patients with asthma, since it (correctly in my view) identifies the individual who

should be most involved in managing asthma. This is not the respiratory physician or the psychiatrist, not even the family doctor, but the patient himself. As the author rightly points out, a major aim of management is education of the patient (or his parents), and any episode of severe asthma should be regarded as a failure of previous medical care.

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Emerging Concepts of Alcohol Dependence. By E. MANSELL PATTISON, MARK B. SOBELL and LINDA C. SOBELL. New York: Springer Publishing Co. 1977. Pp 335. \$18.95.

Since the Second World War, alcoholism has been viewed less as a moral problem than as a disease. There is no doubt that this change has been a welcome one and has led to considerable resources being donated by medical and social care agencies to the alcoholic. Such an approach, however, has led to certain doubtful propositions e.g. that there is a unitary concept which can be called alcoholism; that alcoholics and pre-alcoholics differ in some essential psychological or physical way from those without this problem; that alcoholics experience irresistible compulsions and once they begin drinking enter a continuous drinking bout; that alcoholism is a progressive disease which is totally irreversible.

This volume challenges such basic traditional concepts. This is done by the use of a series of papers published elsewhere with commentary on these papers, together with critical essays on traditional concepts and the development of a revised model of alcohol dependence. It should be stated here that the authors have perhaps overestimated the rigidity which those of us in the alcohol field have towards the so-called basic concepts, i.e. many people already do accept their revised model, at least in this country.

Nevertheless this is a very important book, as nowhere else is the evidence for and against traditional concepts so easily available. This book is primarily for specialists in the alcoholism field, irrespective of discipline, providing they have a sound knowledge of basic concepts. For such people it will become obligatory reading.

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