

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.