

re-educating them and society generally towards a more positive view of their sex.

Ameliorative public health programmes are obviously crucial. So too is collective action from which, as Seid points out, women have often been diverted into paralysing preoccupation with themselves and their bodies. In taking the broader view, however, this lively volume also raises other, more specific questions – whether, for instance, anorexia is a defence against feared pregnancy or sexual permissiveness – only to leave them tantalisingly unanswered.

JANET SAYERS, *Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Kent, Canterbury, Kent*

The Prevention of Suicide. Edited by RACHEL JENKINS, SIAN GRIFFITHS, IAN WYLE, *et al.* Geneva: WHO. 1994. 194 pp. £35.00 (pb).

This is a compilation of papers presented at a two-day conference organised by the Department of Health, Faculty of Public Health Medicine, the Royal College of General Practitioners and the Royal College of Psychiatrists. The underlying motivation for the conference appears to be the Health of the Nation targets, relating to the strategy for mental illness by reducing the overall suicide rate by at least 15%, and the lifetime suicide rate in people with severe mental illness by at least a third.

This volume is particularly valuable in that it brings together leading researchers and clinicians, and contains most that is relevant in the advance of both the understanding and practice of suicide prevention. Reviewing such a book in detail is daunting given the wide range of authors and subject matter, but a look at the list of authors will satisfy most clinicians that they should have a copy available. I personally shall certainly ensure that our local community mental health teams respond to the stimulating article by Geraldine Strathdee and colleagues entitled “The challenge of suicide prevention in a local service”, and the local liaison service to both Johnson & Thornicroft’s paper “General medical services – accident and emergency departments” and Morgan *et al* on “Secondary care”.

Keith Hawton artfully sums up the “Causes and opportunities for prevention” and is, as ever, readable and relevant. I thought his comment on the importance that “those in the caring professions who are frequently doing their utmost to prevent suicide, often within services with meagre resources, are not subjected to automatic morale-sapping condemnation when a suicide occurs” is particularly pertinent in the current climate. Key workers and responsible medical officers will increasingly be held responsible for perceived lapses in care, resourced or not.

There is enough dry factual information from the Department of Health to keep the statisticians happy,

and the conference was opened with the surprisingly informed, if somewhat platitudinous, address by the Secretary of State for Health.

I personally do not believe that the Health of the Nation targets on suicide prevention are achievable by the year 2000, but I applaud the impact the policy is having on placing these issues on the national agenda, resulting in a re-examination of the causes and prevention of suicide, and the probable subsequent improvement in clinical practice. No purchaser, provider or clinician can afford not to be familiar with the information contained in this book.

DAVID ROY, *South Western Hospital, Pulross Road, London*

The Medical Basis of Psychiatry (2nd edn). Edited by GEORGE WINOKUR and PAULA CLAYTON. Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders. 1994. 601 pp. £46.00 (hb).

This is the second edition of a book first published in 1986. Intended as a reference textbook for all doctors from students to practising physicians, its layout is novel, based on four units: adult syndromes, child psychiatry, symptoms clusters and special areas.

Although like many reference texts it looks formidable, clear simple language and excellent illustrative vignettes make this textbook immensely enjoyable and easy to read. The tables are admirable, the reference lists are valuable, and the editorial comments add to the text without diminishing its flow. Within the chapters the sections on differential diagnosis and treatment are thorough, and include discussion of the place of psychodynamic psychotherapy and psychological treatments wherever appropriate. Epidemiological issues attract wider cultural discussion than is found in most UK reference texts, and the subject also merits a separate chapter at the end of the book.

Particularly commendable are the last two units. The unit on symptom clusters takes the opportunity to outline the principal symptoms in psychiatric practice, to examine them in detail and within the context of other medical conditions. The final unit on special areas has six short chapters, including “Use of the laboratory in psychiatry” and “Clinical psychopharmacology and other somatic therapies”, which are excellent. Indeed, every chapter in these two units is well constructed and fascinating to read.

Less favourable aspects of the book include its sole use of the DSM classification system. Students revising for the UK examinations are required to adhere to the ICD system. The inclusion of a section on the use of clozapine in the treatment of schizophrenia is of great value, but curiously there is much less said about some of the newer treatments of depressive illness. The subspeciality of learning disability is only referred to in