

Oxford textbook of geriatric medicine. Edited by J Grimley Evans and T Franklin Williams. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992. 756pp. £85.00.

This is the third large British textbook of geriatric medicine—British in the sense that one of the two editors and the publisher are from Oxford. Only 39 of the 108 authors are British, an interesting fact in view of the leading role of the UK in the development of the specialty. What is the purpose of a large textbook of geriatric medicine? Few, if any, diseases are unique to old age, and they are well described in textbooks of medicine. Indeed it would be interesting to know how many specialists in geriatric medicine would refer to a textbook of geriatric medicine rather than a textbook of medicine if they had a problem on their wards. The difference between ill-health in old people and in younger people is in the pattern of disease, the presentation of a breakdown of health, and the systems of management. It is on these that a textbook of geriatric medicine should concentrate, supplementing textbooks of medicine with their classical descriptions of diseases.

The textbook starts with sections on demography and biological ageing. The arrangement of the rest of the book is rather curious. In general, the sections deal with the systems of the body in the same order as the *Oxford textbook of medicine*. However, stroke has a section of its own, appropriate because of the special importance of this condition to older people. Strangely, however, stroke is now in a section separate from the other neurological disorders. Dementia, which has a very short chapter in relation to its importance in the health care of elderly people, is also in the section in neurology and psychology, but a different section deals with psychiatry in later life and includes a welcome chapter on the problems of carers from the point of view of both the UK and the US. Cardiovascular disease, the single largest cause of morbidity and mortality in old age, has a single chapter section of only sixteen pages, whereas the section on gastroenterology has eight chapters covering 92 pages and is the only section to have its own editor. There are welcome sections on 'geriatric' topics such as injuries in later life, nutrition and ageing, anaesthesiology and medical aspects of surgery, symptom management, services to older people, health promotion and ethical issues.

One way of assessing the value of this book is to compare it with its 'parent', the *Oxford textbook of medicine*, which itself has a short section on medicine in old age. It is clear that the *Oxford textbook of geriatric medicine* succeeds in its aim of describing the extra things that need to be known over and above the content of general (internal) medicine. For detailed descriptions of pathophysiology the *Oxford textbook of medicine* will have to be consulted, whereas the practical management of ill-health in old age is described in the *Oxford textbook of geriatric medicine*. It is to be hoped

that the latter will be consulted by general physicians who have problems in the management of ill-health in their elderly patients.

It is worth considering whether a textbook of geriatric medicine should include a chapter on the 'new biology' and its applications to the study of ageing. This will certainly be of importance in the future, and is already providing new insights into Alzheimer's disease. But perhaps we do not need to be concerned about the future. Professor Grimley Evans would like to introduce the word 'geratology' to describe his specialty. The *Shorter Oxford English dictionary* defines geratology as 'the science of the phenomena of decadence, especially in a species of animals approaching extinction'. Does he know something the rest of us do not know?

R W STOUT

Professor of Geriatric Medicine, The Queen's University of Belfast

Psychology in medicine. By I C McManus. Butterworth Heinemann, Oxford: 1992. 327pp. £14.95.

Over the past 15 years, psychology has become established in medical education, and a majority of medical schools now employ academic psychologists to teach their students in the pre-clinical years. Several text books have now been published to meet the needs of medical students. *Psychology in medicine* is a new addition to this market, and has its origins in the course taught by Chris McManus at St Mary's Hospital Medical School.

The book is divided into three sections. The first discusses basic processes, and has chapters on learning, intelligence, personality and other fundamental psychological phenomena. The second section is concerned with general applications of psychology to medicine, and includes discussions of doctor-patient communication, diagnosis, pain and stress-related illness. The last section is predominantly concerned with psychiatric conditions, but also includes chapters on smoking, alcohol consumption and other specific topics at the frontier between psychology and clinical practice. Each chapter is prefaced by a brief list of summary statements which help to orientate the reader to the major points that are addressed. The style is colloquial without being overfamiliar, and the volume includes a sensible list of further readings.

Despite the merits of the thoughtful organisation of the text, I do not feel able unequivocally to recommend this volume to medical or other health care students. All too frequently, the author allows his enthusiasms to run away with him at the expense of a balanced presentation. The chapters on perception, intelligence and cognition delve into relatively abstruse phenomena rather than delineating major themes that might be relevant to medicine. Emphasis is placed on personal construct theory which will appear too excessive to readers who are not adherents