Medical subjects can be very 'heavy' to the family physician who must view so many disorders in a different light than the traditional specialties. I highly recommend this book.

Reviewed by W. H. Bryant, MD. Dr. Bryant, a Certificant of the College, practices family medicine in Kitchener, Ont.

MDs Challenged on Mental Illness Theory
Title: The Myth of Mental Illness – Foundations of a Theory of Personal Conduct
Author: T. S. Szasz
Publisher: Fitzhenry & Whiteside Ltd., 150 Lesmill Rd., Don Mills, Ont.
Price: $10.30
Pages: 297

Dr. Szasz has written a book which is partly designed for general public consumption, but which is obviously aimed at members of the helping professions dealing in the psychiatric area. He is not at all easy on physicians as a group, but there are some realities of medical practice which demand close scrutiny by all physicians.

Parts I and II of the book are devoted to Szasz's perceptions of the social, historical and epistemological roots in medical concepts of mental illness. He sees classical psychoanalysis as being deterministic (the past is the predictor of the future) and therefore opposed in many ways to modern concepts of individual freedom of choice. He is highly critical of many of Freud's ideas and feels that the roots of the problem lie in Freud's insistence that hysteria was not malingering, but rather a disease, 'a mental illness'.

Szasz uses hysteria as a paradigm of so-called mental illness, as he moves into Parts III, IV and V, in which he develops his own thesis of human behavior, based primarily in game theory. He develops convincing arguments that most mental illnesses are not things that 'happen' to people – like bodily disease – but rather are things that people bring about through their failure, or refusal, to understand and to play appropriately in the game they are in. He feels that many mental illnesses are contrived by the person in an attempt to alter the rules of the game, and that the 'sick' individual impersonates a weak, helpless and hopeless person, possibly with bodily ailments, while in fact the realities are his frustrations, unhappiness and various social and ethical dilemmas. Psychiatrists and physicians in general are involved in this duplicity, because they treat the person as 'sick' and reinforce his impersonation and helplessness, often for their own selfish purposes.

Because of its implicit and explicit destruction of individual freedom, "There is no medical, moral, or legal justification for involuntary psychiatric interventions. They are crimes against humanity". Szasz includes in the involuntary category such things as commitment to an institution and psychiatric labelling of individuals by schools, social agencies, courts, etc.

Since he has frequent contact with people who might be denied their freedoms in these ways, the family physician can gain some valuable understanding from this book.

Reviewed by J. P. Newell, MD. Dr. Newell teaches family medicine at the University of Western Ontario, London, Ont.

Useful Review Of Pathology
Title: Practical Concepts in Human Disease
Author: H. C. Bickley, Phd
Publisher: Burns & MacEachern Ltd., 62 Raidsie Rd., Don Mills, Ont.
Price: $11.55
Pages: 332

In his foreword the author states of his book that "It is intended to cover the material generally considered 'core' in the subject of pathology with a few non-traditional subjects added for good measure". He succeeded in his aim, producing a teaching book that is too basic to act as a work of reference and does not contain sufficient information for the serious student of pathology. It would be a useful book for the practice eligible family physician doing some preliminary reading for the certification exam.

The book covers simply and clearly important areas such as immunology, neoplasia and infections; it also has a good bibliography for further study. The layout and tabulation are geared to this type of learning, thus adding to its usefulness.

Reviewed by P. K. Hunt, MB. Dr. Hunt, a Certificant of the College, practices family medicine in Fort Saskatchewan, Alta.

'Selective Reading' Is Required For Book on Biofeedback
Title: New Mind, New Body
Author: Barbara B. Brown, PhD
Publisher: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 150 Lesmill Rd., Don Mills, Ont.
Price: $14.35
Pages: 464

As the writer says in this new publication, biofeedback is "the principle that the mind and body can use information about themselves, to teach themselves a new awareness". A subject who receives a signal that his EEG is recording alpha waves learns to associate that signal with the subjective relaxation he experiences. Soon he is able to control his alpha waves, and thus his anxiety, voluntarily.

Much of the difficulty with this 464 page book is its size. One has to wade through much repetitious information, largely due, unfortunately, to the writer's attempt at providing us with impressive prose. This can on occasion become very discouraging as when she relates that "watching brain waves gives (her) the feeling of suddenly having discovered where halos come from", or her personal revelation that "I often stand entranced in front of the EEG machine, scarcely believing the beauty and indescribable complexity of the brain's electrical activity... flying so swiftly past my eyes".

In spite of this, selective reading of this work is worthwhile. The description of feedback of the skin's electrical activity to the subject, allowing him to control anxiety and tension, as well as the information on experimental control of heart rate and blood pressure offer interesting concepts. Perhaps the most fascinating of all is Chapter 12 and its description of the very plausible applications of biofeedback in the near future.

However, the value of this book to family physicians lies not in its detailed account of biofeedback theory, but rather in the realization that besides the classical psychophysiolegic illness, there exist a host of other traditional "organic" disorders which may in whole or in part be treated through psychological means, be that biofeedback, hypnosis, or traditional psychotherapy.

Reviewed by H. J. Dyan, MD. Dr. Dyan is a resident in family medicine at Toronto's New Mount Sinai Hospital.