New Insights On Arterial Disease In The Elderly

Title: Arterial Disease in the Elderly
Editor: R. W. Stout
Publisher: Churchill Livingstone Inc., 1560 Broadway, New York, NY. 10036 U.S.A.
Publication Date: 1984
Pages: 249

This book came across my desk as I was preparing for a symposium on hypertension in the elderly. A more appropriate book I could not have wished for.

The book is part of the series *Medicine in Old Age*, a series that is intended to stand midway between the immediacy of medical journals and the oversimplification of standard textbooks. This multi-authored book is divided into two main sections: atherosclerosis and hypertension, with seven authors contributing to each section. Chapters include all the clinically relevant areas; for atherosclerosis, there are chapters on aging and atherosclerosis, lipids, diabetes, sex hormones, and prevention; for hypertension, the chapters are on pathogenesis, epidemiology assessment, drugs, and when to treat.

The review of each topic is thorough, scholarly, and surprisingly easy to digest. Each area bristles with controversy and unresolved questions, yet one is left with a greater understanding of the issues, some direction, and eager anticipation of future developments. A new insight for me was the important role of high insulin levels in diabetic patients developing atherosclerotic complications. Another was the clear association between systolic blood pressure and mortality in those under 75, which completely disappears in patients over age 75.

My major criticism of the book concerns overlap of the content of adjacent chapters. This is a flaw of many multi-authored books.

I would recommend this book as an excellent addition to hospital libraries, where the relevant chapter can be used by family physicians preparing to present a seminar or rounds. For those with a special interest in geriatrics who want to be on top of the controversies in atherosclerosis and hypertension, this book should be useful for about two years.

Reviewed by Martin J. Bass. Dr. Bass, a certificat of the College, is director of research in the Department of Family Medicine and associate professor in the Department of Epidemiology at the University of Western Ontario.

Valuable Anthology On Humanistic Med.

Title: To Provide Safe Passage, The Humanistic Aspects of Medicine
Editors: David Rabin, Pauline L. Rabin
Publisher: Philosophical Library, 200 West 57th St., New York, NY. 10010, U.S.A.
Publication Date: 1985
Pages: 258
Price: $19.95.

This book deals with a subject of profound importance to family physicians and, indeed, all who care for the sick. It was motivated by the editors’ desire to “draw attention to the attitudes of society in general and physicians in particular towards persons with progressive or terminal illness, dementia, and mental illness and the ways in which the lot of these people can be improved”.

The anthology begins with a republication of Francis W. Peabody’s classic essay, “The Care of the Patient”. This masterpiece, written in 1927, is an inspiring call to all physicians and should be required reading for all family physicians. It should certainly be included on reading lists for family medicine residents.

The essays by David and Pauline Rabin relate to Dr. David Rabin’s battle with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis. Throughout this series, the message is overshadowed by the intensity of their anger—directed not at the disease—but rather at the ‘friends’ and ‘colleagues’ who abandoned them.

Interesting and important pieces on cancer patients, intractable pain, care of the demented patient, acute grief and other subjects that, inappropriately, have received little attention, are included in this collection.

This is a troubling book for physicians to read. We are reminded on every page of our inadequacies when confronted by desperate, chronically ill, and dying patients. Despite the discomfort it generates, this book makes a worthy addition to the libraries of all family physicians who are concerned with the distress of their fellow man.

Reviewed by Ronald Christie. Dr. Christie, recently deceased, was a certificat of the College, and an associate professor and director of residency training in the Department of Family Medicine, University of Western Ontario.

Read With Relish

Title: Will Pickles of Wensleydale. The Life of a Country Doctor
Author: John Pemberton
Publisher: The Royal College of General Practitioners, Publications Office, 9 Marlborough Rd., Exeter, Devon, U.K.
Publication Date: 1984
Pages: 224
Price: £10.50

It all started with my reading the Mozart letters some 20 years ago; how on earth could such a petty man write such divine music? Since then, I have not been a fan of biographies, because I am not happy at having my heroes shown to be much like the rest of us. So I opened this book with misgivings. Should I send it back to Madam Editor and preserve my illusions about a medical hero of mine? Hesitantly I started, and I read the following couplet: “His feet are clay although his face is brass and this you will discover before the fortnight pass”.

This was how Pickles described himself in 1949 in a letter to a young doctor, when inviting him to do a locum in Pickles’ practice; that young doctor would become Professor John Pemberton, the author of this biography—and that description gave me the courage to review this book.

The first half of the book is a bit precious and symptomatic of the author’s struggle to relate Pickles’ exceptional and privileged youth. There are some amusing tales . . . but then comes the story of Pickles’ maturation as a man and a doctor.

Despite wife Gerty’s description of Will as a “redhot socialist”, he took a really political stand on only one issue: the National Health Service.