The question of 'writing orders', or not, which occurs in the context of in-patient referrals, when one team consults another, is a difficult one. Should the consulted team write a list of things to do, or should they go ahead and organise the investigations and treatments they feel are necessary? Which is the more courteous? The terms of the referral might suggest the more appropriate response, but the final arbiter should be the patient's best interests.

Some points in the editorial which clearly do apply within the NHS are worth emphasising. The suggestions that the referrer should prepare the patient's expectations; should clearly indicate the scope of the referral to the Consultant; and that the Consultant should present a timely report to the referring physician, are all very apt and we would do well to heed them. The final assertion that "open communication is the cornerstone of a successful consultation" is worth serious contemplation.

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1 Abdallat AM Consultation among physicians: conflict or complimentary purposes? *Postgrad Med J* 1998;74:513-4.

Book reviews

ABC of mental health, T Davies, T Craig, eds, 80 pp, illus. BMJ Publishing Group, London, 1998. £16.95, paperback

This book first appeared as a weekly series in the BMJ and has been re-published as a short book of 20 chapters, covering topics related to mental health. The style of the book is one of brief notes with boxes and bullet points outlining those facts which are most important.

The book is designed to be read not only by doctors but also by other professions involved in mental health, such as nursing, social work, the legal profession and the police. The style is non-specialist and, although the chapters are brief, they contain the key facts about each area.

The book covers many areas of importance to doctors practising in the general hospital. The initial chapters concentrate on mental health assessment and on mental health emergencies as well as particular mental health problems presenting in general hospitals. There then follow a number of chapters reviewing the range of mental illness and presenting the essentials of aetiology, diagnosis and management. The final chapters relate to particular groups of patients, such as children, ethnic minorities and the homeless. There are also chapters on the law and drug and psychological treatments.

This book is clearly aimed at the non-psychiatrist. It would be a particularly useful book to be available in casualty departments, and many general physicians and surgeons would find it helpful in refreshing their knowledge about particular conditions or management options. It provides an introduction to physicians on the management of common conditions they may encounter, such as depression and alcoholism. It also helps explain the principles of techniques such as cognitive behavioural therapy. It is clearly written and attempts to provide practical advice and current mainstream opinion on topics covered. It uses non-technical language wherever possible and hopefully will lead to greater recognition and dialogue between physicians and psychiatrists. The management of difficult somatising patients or the intricacies of the mental health act are difficult to deal with in brief note form but

there is in this book a framework that helps to clarify these difficult areas. I would recommend it as a useful addition to most departments and would strongly advise casualty departments to have a copy available.

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Postgraduate surgery: the candidate's guide, 2nd edn, Mar Al-Fallouji, pp 665, illus. Butterworth Heinemann, 1998. £75.00, hardback

This textbook is intended primarily as a revision aid for surgeons preparing for the MRCS/ FRCS exams. This book is already very popular with trainee surgeons because of its short notes and factual content on most of the key points in various core specialties of surgery. This makes it rather heavy going, as the author has attempted to cover most aspects of surgery, a task which is impossible for a book of this size.

In comparison to the 1st edition some important sections have been updated (eg, those on shock, radiotherapy/chemotherapy, and *Helicobacter pylori*) or added (eg, acid-base balance, laparoscopic and day case surgery, transplantation, HIV, and surgical audit). The new section on the shape of surgical training is useful for trainees but the time and space reserved for the section on nuclear warfare and Gulf war syndrome would have been better applied to improving the poorer sections, eg, those on surgery for gastro-oesophageal reflux (no mention of laparoscopic Nissen's), oesophageal cancer, and peripheral vascular disease. Some sections are particularly useful, eg, elective and emergency surgical operations and the examples of clinical short cases. Unfortunately, some of the diagrams are very basic, particularly for the clinical scenarios and physical signs; original photographs would have been appreciated.

Towards the end of the book the author has provided a somewhat biased and outdated reading list. Most of the important clinical trials that candidates are now asked about in postgraduate exams are distinctly lacking. In summary, this book serves as a useful revision

aid and purchasers will not be disappointed if they wish to brush up their knowledge a month before their exams. The author deserves some credit for attempting the onerous task of writing a single book for the MRCS/FRCS exams, especially as it is aimed at a market where there are a number of more weighty rival volumes.

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Pathology for surgeons in training, 2nd edn, D Gardner, D Tweedle, viii + 408 pp. Arnold, 1996. £29.50, paperback

This book is aimed at surgical senior house officers preparing for the AFRCS or MRCS. The authors are both examiners for the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh. The text is well written and the subject matter is suitably broad without entering into unnecessary detail; this is ideal for what is currently required for postgraduate surgical exams.

There is an emphasis on common diseases, which is appropriate, but many pathologically important diseases are mentioned only briefly. The few illustrations are in the form of well-drawn line diagrams.

The format is strictly alphabetical in the form of an encyclopaedia. This results in a number of anomalies, firstly in that related subjects are widely separated. Cross-referencing attempts to mitigate against this difficulty, but is incomplete. Secondly, within the disease-related section, the sub-sections are listed on a strictly alphabetical basis rather than in an anatomical or disease-related order.

It is not clear whether this book sets out to be a reference or an easily readable revision text. It is insufficiently detailed for a reference text and its strictly alphabetical layout results in discontinuity, making it very difficult to sit down and read for revision purposes, even though its size and depth would be ideal for this.

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