What your patients may be reading

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Undoubtedly women visit their doctor more frequently than men.¹ In the 15-44 age group women go twice as often, though this is the age group of women who are particularly likely to attend for contraceptive or antenatal care. But even in other age groups women are more prone to seek help from their general practitioner.² Women go to their doctor not only on their own behalf but also for their husbands, their children, and their aged parents. They are not only consumers of health care but are also the major producers of informal community care.^{3,4}

In 1888 the Philadelphia physician Silas Weir Mitchell was of the opinion that women's natural state is unhealthy. "Wise women," believed Mitchell "choose their doctors and trust them. The wisest ask the fewest questions."⁵ A hundred years later most women are seeking more information about their own health and the health of those in their care.

There is some evidence that women are less satisfied than men by the information given by health care staff and are more likely to be bothered by not understanding medical explanations.⁶ They are also more likely to seek information elsewhere. A recently published review of health information services for consumers in the United Kingdom⁷ compares the inquiries received by the health information service at the Lister Hospital in Stevenage with those received by Help for Health in Southampton. Records kept by the two services indicate that women inquirers outnumber men three to one. It has been estimated that the "agony aunts" employed by women's magazines receive over half a million letters a year.⁸ Claire Rayner alone reported a total of 50 000 letters in 1983.⁹ Clearly from the output of popular medical publishers there is also a ready market for health books aimed at women readers.

The latest example of the general health guide for women is *Your Body: a Woman's Guide to Her Sexual Health* (£6.99 paperback. Wellingborough: Thorsons, 1987. ISBN 0-7225-1422-0). Written by women (largely freelance medical writers) for women, the book carries the endorsement of the Marie Stopes Clinic. Birth control, hysterectomy, the menopause, the premenstrual syndrome, sexually transmitted diseases, and sexual violence are some of the subjects given sympathetic and detailed attention. I would have liked some clearer illustrations, however. Those explaining alternative hysterectomy operations, where good illustrations could go a long way towards dispelling fear and misunderstanding, are particularly grey and fuzzy.

From the same publisher comes *Alternative Health Care for Women* by Patsy Westcott (£5.99 paperback. Wellingborough: Thorsons, 1987. ISBN 0-7225-1360-7). The book is divided into four main parts: staying healthy; women's illnesses and what to expect from conventional and complementary medicine; issues relating to fertility and reproduction; and a final section describing the principal alternative treatments. Advice is given on how to find a reputable therapist, and there are suggestions for further reading. A chart at the end of the book allows the reader to match ailments with possible treatments, indicating which have good results and which are merely "worth a try." It seems that for migraine it is worth trying anything except dance therapy, but for chlamydial infection alternative treatments have little to offer.

A new series of books from Optima includes guides to coping with the premenstrual syndrome and menopause. Both books were

originally published in the United States. *Self Help with PMS* by Michael Harrison (£5.95 paperback. London: Macdonald Optima, 1987. ISBN 0-356-12559-9) discusses the effect the premenstrual syndrome can have on personal relationships and gives advice on diet, exercise, and lifestyle. There are charts for the reader to record her own premenstrual symptoms. Dr Harrison suggests several types of help, including alternative treatments, and also gives advice on which treatments should not be sought as a cure for the syndrome. These include having a hysterectomy or undergoing electroconvulsive therapy. The dietary approach to the premenstrual syndrome is also covered by *Beat PMS Through Diet* by Maryon Stewart (£4.95 paperback. London: Ebury Press, 1987. ISBN 0-85223-655-7). Based on the programme devised by the Premenstrual Tension Advisory Service (PO Box 268, Hove, East Sussex, BN3 1RW. Telephone 0273-771366), the book shows sufferers how they can evaluate their own symptoms and "create a diet personally tailored to cure their own particular problem."

Menopause

The second Optima book is one of several books on menopause recently published. Each is broadly similar, giving practical advice, quoting women's experiences, covering osteoporosis in some detail, and outlining the pros and cons of hormone replacement therapy. There is, however, a wide difference in price and value for money. *Menopause: the Natural Way* by Saja Greenwood (£5.95 paperback. London: Macdonald Optima, 1987. ISBN 0-356-12561-0) is attractively designed and amusingly illustrated with jolly cartoons (the chapter on postmenopause zest shows a vigorous lady gaily kicking away a packet of tampons). The author is a San Franciscan doctor, and the American origin is underlined by the endorsement of Jane Fonda. Although the book claims to be "clearly designed for easy reference," it lacks an index. A better buy for the British reader is *Menopause: the Woman's View* by Anne Dickson and Nikki Henriques (£4.99 paperback. Wellingborough: Thorsons, 1987. ISBN 0-7225-1425-5), written by the same authors as the well regarded *Women on Hysterectomy: or How Long Before I Can Hang-glide?* (£4.99 paperback. Wellingborough: Thorsons, 1986. ISBN 0-7225-1164-7). It is well indexed for quick reference and takes more trouble to explain basic concepts like "What is a hormone?" "Why do we need oestrogen?" An interesting chapter on "Men and the menopause" examines men's attitudes to a situation which often they don't understand and makes a plea for more research on men in mid-life. The book concludes with a brief homoeopathic materia medica.

Menopause: the Best Years of Your Life? by Ada Kahn and Linda Hughey Holt (£12.95 hardback. London: Bloomsbury, 1987. ISBN 0-7475-0070-3) is a weighty and detailed hardback again of American origin. Based on interviews with 1000 women, it gives their views on doctors, different treatments, and strategies for living full lives, as well as practical advice from the authors. There are details of British organisations in this edition as well as a useful bibliography on the menopause and women's health in general. All the same, I am not sure why anyone should want to spend £12.95 on this book when the ground is covered as well, and in some areas better, by an excellent new booklet from the Health Education Authority (*The Menopause: a Guide for Women of All Ages* by Jill Rakusen (£1.25 each, minimum order 10 copies. London: Health Education Authority, 1987. ISBN 0-80682-981-2). Although it is designed to be given away by local health education units, clinics, etc, calling it a booklet is to do the publication an injustice. An 80 page fully indexed guide, it tackles the subject with a clarity that makes it accessible to less educated readers while remaining detailed

enough for those who wish to go deeper into the subject. For example, the section on hormone replacement therapy contains an annotated bibliography of books presenting both sides of the argument for women who want to explore the issues further. There are also lists of self help groups and other organisations at every stage of the booklet, from the Older Lesbian Network to the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners. Jill Rakusen was the coauthor of the British edition of the classic women's health manual *Our Bodies Ourselves* (£8.95 paperback. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978. ISBN 0-14-004430-2), now desperately in need of a new edition. With this in mind the expectations of many readers of *The Menopause* will be high. They won't be disappointed.

Cancer in women

"Two thousand women die every year from cervical cancer, yet it is a preventable disease." The covers of two new books on cervical cancer both bear these words, and both cover similar ground. At first sight *Your Smear Test* by Graham Barker (£4.95 paperback. London: Adamson, 1987. ISBN 0-948543-30-2) seems narrower in scope. It sets out to explain in depth the process from the taking of a cervical smear through reporting, colposcopy, and treatment. But there are also sections on causes of cervical abnormalities, emotional problems, and prevention, which brings it closer in scope to *Cervical Cancer and How to Stop Worrying About It* by Judith Harvey, Sue Mack, and Julian Woolfson (£3.95 paperback. London: Faber and Faber, 1987. ISBN 0-571-14984-7). *Cervical Cancer* scores with a more friendly, upbeat style and also provides answers to a wider range of worries and misconceptions. There is a whole chapter on the role of men in cervical cancer and a useful checklist of questions to ask the doctor. *Your Smear Test*, on the other hand, is better illustrated. Unfamiliar equipment can be frightening to patients and it is helpful to have the illustrations of a vaginal speculum and colposcope.

Other new self help guides cover breast cancer. The first of these is *Disorderly Breasts. A Guide to Breast Cancer, Other Breast Disorders and Their Treatments* by Sarah Boston and Jill Louw (£5.95 paperback. London: Camden Press, 1987. ISBN 0-948491-27-2), an eye-catching volume with a cover illustration from the same series of Matisse blue nudes as that which adorns the cover of *Cervical Cancer and How to Stop Worrying About It*. The authors argue that there are numerous treatments (orthodox and complementary) for breast cancer and a lack of consensus on their effectiveness. Because there is a variety of opinion it is particularly important that women should be fully informed about benefits and risks and give voluntary, informed consent to treatment.

Living with Breast Cancer and Mastectomy by Nicholas Tarrier (£15.00 hardback, £4.95 paperback. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987. ISBN 0-7190-2314-9) is one of a new series of rather oddly entitled "Professional Self Help Guides." The author, a clinical psychologist, devised the use of a cognitive/behavioural programme to help patients with breast cancer to cope with psychological stress, and these techniques for stress management form the main part of the book. Cancer in women also forms an important part of a typically thorough new guide from Penguin, *Living With Cancer* by Jenny Bryan and Joanna Lyall (£3.95 paperback. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987. ISBN 0-14-009409-1). Particularly well treated are the practical and financial aspects such as joining a self help group, finding a hospice, and putting your affairs in order.

Women caring for others

As Princess Anne once drily observed, an occupational hazard of being a woman is motherhood. Becoming a mother heralds for many women a profound change in themselves and their way of life. Like a lot of childless, professional women Brigid McConville had enjoyed a world of independence, achievement, friends, and colleagues. When her daughter was born she felt she had lost this world and had no knowledge of the world of mothers. An article in the *Guardian's*

women's page led to a book (a common route it seems). Writing *Mad To Be a Mother: Is There Life After Birth For Women Today?* (£5.95 paperback. London: Century, 1987. ISBN 0-7126-1697-7) was inspired by the discovery that society's image of motherhood as selfless and nurturing, tender and caring is far from the reality. It is a provocative and stimulating book, written with wit and style (one section is headed "Paradise lost: when Milton means bleach") but it is also positive and supportive with practical examples of mothers grouping together for mutual support and practical initiatives such as consumer surveys.

Increasing numbers of women now care for ill, disabled, or elderly relatives at home. Most care willingly and with love but always at some cost to themselves—financially, socially, emotionally, and physically. Getting help can be complicated and many people don't know where to turn. *Caring At Home* by Nancy Kohner (£2.50 paperback. Cambridge: National Extension College, 1988. ISBN 1-85356-004-9) was commissioned by the King's Fund Informal Caring Unit to answer these questions, and it succeeds superbly, providing clear and detailed guidance through the maze of services, help in the home, money and legal matters, and support. Copies of the book are available in bulk at a discount and there is the option of customised local inserts. Further details from National Extension College, 18 Brooklands Avenue, Cambridge, CB2 2HN, telephone 0223-316644.

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WORDS -PTER- (Gk *pteryx*, wing) is used in many terms describing animal possession of wings, or some relationship thereto. It is also to be found in some unlikely places. In anatomy, for example, the downward processes of the sphenoid bone are called PTERYGOID from a fancied resemblance to a wing-like shape, and the two pterygoid muscles on each side are so called from their attachment to the aforesaid processes. The PTERION is a craniometric point adjacent thereto, situated at the junction of the greater wing of the sphenoid and the squamous temporal bones. A PTERYGIUM is a wing shaped triangular patch of thickened bulbar sub-conjunctival tissue, extending from the inner canthus of the eye and pointing towards the cornea, and ultimately, the pupil.

AMINOPTERIN is a folic acid antagonist formerly used in the treatment of acute leukaemia in children. Folic acid, a member of the B group vitamins, is PTEROYLGLUTAMIC ACID. This is short for pteridine+para-aminobenzoic acid+glutamic acid. But what, you may ask, has this to do with wings? PTERIDINE is a two ring heterocyclic compound, of which the PTERINS are a class of naturally occurring derivatives. The pterins are a major source of a wide variety of pigments found in butterfly wings, and in other insects including, for example, in the integument of wasps.

A description of the wings, using Greek roots, is an important means of naming various orders of insects. Thus, we have hymenoptera (Gk *hymen*, membrane) for the bees, wasps, and ants that have membranous wings; coleoptera (Gk *koleos*, sheath) for the beetles that have horny forewings; diptera (Gk *di-*, twice) for the two winged flies; and the aptera (Gk *a-*, privative, not) for those without wings, such as *Lepisma saccharina*, our familiar friend the domestic "silver fish." Also without wings, or so vestigial as to merit the name *Apteryx*, is the New Zealand kiwi. Even some mammals have wings—derived from a double fold of skin, stretching along each side from foot to "hand," the CHIROPTERA (Gk *cheir*, hand), or bats. But what shall we call an aircraft that is raised by the rotation of a screw shaped helical wing? Why, a HELICO-PTER, of course.

As to pronunciation, English speakers have no difficulty in sounding "p" before "t" where the "p" is preceded by a vowel, as in "diptera"; but where a word begins with "pt-" they prefer a silent "p."—B J FREEDMAN.