

BOOKS IN BRIEF

Robin Shohet (ed). *Passionate medicine: making the transition from conventional medicine to homeopathy.* London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2005. pp 192, £9.95/\$28.95, ISBN 1 84310 298 6. Reviewed by Houghton A in *BMJ* 2005; 331:1276

The contributors are five doctors and two vets who struggled with the practice of conventional medicine and found a more natural home in homoeopathy. The seven clinicians tell their stories and "are remarkable in not having been prepared to make the compromises that modern medicine required of them. Most of their stories have a strong spiritual theme."

Kurt Link. *The vaccine controversy: the history, use, and safety of vaccinations.* Praeger, 2005. pp 208, £19.99/\$34.95, ISBN 0 275 98472 9. Reviewed by R Roberts in *BMJ* 2005; 331:1209

The book provides a summary of the history of vaccines along with some basic information on features of vaccines. The reviewer, head of the vaccine-preventable disease programme in Wales, states that while the book covers some interesting historic details about vaccination, it has omitted key historical information and current debates.

Peter Baldwin. *Disease and democracy: the industrialized world faces AIDS.* Berkeley, University of California Press, 2005. pp 465, \$44.95, ISBN 0-520-24350-1. Reviewed by J Colgrove in *N Eng J Med* 2005; 353:2824

The author posits that the variations among western nations in formulating public health policy related to the threat of the AIDS epidemic "were influenced by precedents dating, in many instances, to encounters with disease in the 19th century."

Robert H Blank and Janna C Merrick (eds). *End-of-life decision making: a cross-national study.* Cambridge, MIT Press, 2005. pp 266, \$32, ISBN 0-262-02574-4. Reviewed by PJ van der Maas in *N Eng J Med* 2006; 354: 1654.

The contributors from 12 countries, rich and poor, describe the ways in which people make choices about end-of-life issues. Culture, religion and social structure, rather than modern medicine, are the major determining factors.

Jacalyn Duffin (ed). *Clio in the clinic: history in medical practice.* Oxford University Press, 2005. pp 360, £15-50, ISBN 0-195-16128-9. Reviewed by J Pickstone in *Lancet* 2006; 367: 893-894.

The editor asked eminent physicians to describe how the knowledge of medical history had influenced their medical practice. Their autobiographical essays enumerate how a historical perspective adds depth to the understanding of diseases and treatments.

James F Childress, Eric M Meslin and Harold Shapiro (eds). *Belmont revisited: ethical principles for research with human subjects.* Georgetown University Press, 2005. pp 279, \$29-95.

ISBN 1-58901-062-0. Reviewed by B Benham and L Francis in *Lancet* 2006; 367:387-388

The Belmont Report, released in 1979, was a seminal publication in research ethics emphasising patient autonomy, beneficence/non-maleficence and justice. The authors of the original report and other scholars describe the report's historical origins and influence on public policy. The reviewer feels that the book falls short because it fails to address more recent concerns such as conflict of interest and social and behavioural research.

Barry S Levy and Victor W Sidel (eds). *Social injustice and public health.* New York, Oxford University Press, 2006. pp 529, \$59.95, ISBN 0-19-517185-3. Reviewed by SWoolhandler and DU Himmelstein in *N Eng J Med* 2006; 354:1328-1329.

The authors focus on the relationship between social inequality and ill health. They link violence, occupational hazards, poverty and poor sanitation to medical diseases and point to ways of correcting this injustice through advocacy, education and research.

Richard G Wilkinson. *The impact of inequality: how to make sick societies healthier.* New York, New Press, 2005. pp 355, \$27.95. ISBN 1-56584-925-6. Reviewed by LA Cooper in *N Eng J Med* 2006; 354:1329.

The author links psychosocial factors such as low social status and negative experiences in early childhood with biologic stress reactions. The reviewer notes: "He believes that the political action necessary for improving the quality of life will come only after the public understands these issues better."

W Grant Thompson. *The placebo effect and health: combining science and compassionate care.* Amherst, Prometheus Books, 2005. pp 350, \$18. ISBN 1-59102-275-4. Reviewed by HL Fields in *N Eng J Med* 2006; 354:984-985.

The book discusses how modern medicine has intruded on the doctor-patient relationship, which is the core of medical practice. The first part of the book gives an excellent description of the placebo effect but lacks details of recent research. In the second part the author describes factors such as the placebo effect that enhance or diminish a patient's response.

Kathryn Montgomery. *How doctors think: clinical judgment and the practice of medicine.* Oxford University Press, 2005. pp 256, \$39.50, ISBN 0-195-18712-1. Reviewed by D Ofri in *Lancet* 2006; 367:807-808.

Medicine is not a science like chemistry or physics, with absolute rules. It is a practice where the biological variability of disease, humans and social conditions makes absolute rules impossible. Instead of rules, doctors rely on clinical judgement, which is a mixture of science, experience and gut feeling. Although unscientific, this helps them treat patients.