
When should one tell a mother her newborn baby is a mongol? There is a saying that 'if you tell her early she hates the baby, and if you tell her late she hates the doctor'. My own preference is for the latter, though the decision is often taken out of the paediatrician's hands when the parents recognise the facts for themselves at birth.

This book is a novel about John David, a newborn mongol who is rejected by his parents, and the consequences that are faced by the family. It is compelling and easy to read, and many of the events are so realistic that I am left wondering whether the book is based on fact. The paediatrician is terrible (but unfortunately true to life). His opening line 'I am a paediatrician, Mrs Fielding, do you know what that is?' is followed by 'I have to tell you, I am afraid, that your son is going to be a little bit slow'. Some of his lines should be added to Professor Illingworth's article on 'How to worry mother. Some tips for a young paediatrician' (Clin Pediatr (Phila) 1964; 3: 614–6).

Not everyone in John David's family agreed with the parents' decision. An aunt wrote 'one does not return imperfect children like a pair of shoes which do not fit'; granny wanted to foster John David. There was also discussion about the refusal of operation consent (although the problem never arose) and I identified with the mother when she said 'wishing him dead...and doing something about it aren't necessarily the same thing, are they'. I also agreed with the mother about her dislike of the term 'Down's syndrome' which she regarded as an evasion.

The doctors in this story, the paediatrician and the genetic counsellor, come across quite realistically as pretty awful examples of their type, but if this is a true story (as I suspect) then we need to recognise that one role of the doctor in such cases is to act as a focus for the negative feelings that are aroused in parents who have great expectations and little resilience.

Anyone interested in helping the families of handicapped children in the newborn period will enjoy reading this book, taken in conjunction perhaps with Gill Lonsdale's chapter on how to do it properly (G Lonsdale, P Elfer, P Ballard. 


The title Adolescent spine would have been better rephrased 'The immature spine.' Dr Keim's chief clinical expertise lies in the field of spinal deformity and accordingly the bulk of this text deals with scoliosis. The very brief sections on congenital problems, tumours, trauma, and infections reflect the increasing trend for these conditions to be directed towards scoliosis surgeons. While this book is written with the scoliosis surgeon in mind, its brevity and depth are suited admirably to the resident or the non-scoliosis surgeon, both of whom will find all the basic knowledge they require on this subject in a little over 200 pages.

The text is well presented and has a flavour of personal experience which makes it more readable than many others. The illustrations and photographs are just right in number and quality. It is slightly spoiled by repetition; the material on Klippel-Feil syndrome, cervical spine injuries, and tumours being unnecessarily repeated in the early chapters. My only major disagreement with Dr Keim is his main justification for a second edition—'knowledge of the human spine is increasing at a rather rapid pace.' While this book reflects admirably the mushrooming clinical interest in the developing spine, regrettably it is not based upon significantly increased knowledge of its behaviour. None the less, the improved second edition can only do better than the already successful first.

ROBERT A DICKSON


This is a startling and very disturbing collection of 14 essays about the neglect and ill-treatment of children in the child care services in the USA.

While it has a strong North American flavour there is a lot here to stimulate us to question what happens in this country. A professional group in Minnesota publish a 'Child Youth Services' series of which this is the fourth. Whereas previous volumes were a review of the literature of a given topic, this one attempts to treat a subject in depth.

The authors claim that abuse of children in care has obviously not attracted the attention it should. There is hard factual evidence to substantiate the size and the nature of the problem and to show ways of preventing and managing it. Many topics are covered in 145 pages: physical and sexual abuse, the irresponsible management of children in care causing 'foster-care drift', corporal punishment, religious values, and children's rights, to mention but a few.

'The assumption that a child is removed from an abusive or neglected home and placed in a safe environment can no longer be taken at face value'. This epitomises the varied aspects covered in this book. A national conference on Institutional Abuse held in 1977, the establishment of a San Francisco Abuse Council in 1979, and a number of studies carried out at Yale and at the Montefiore Hospital, New York, demonstrate how far the interest and activity in this area have gone in the USA. Many of the essays make gripping reading, some are richly imaginative and others speculatively analytical to try to help us understand the nature and the process of how professionals in child care behave as they do.

This book should serve as a useful model in the critical evaluation of the quality of child care in the UK.

DAVID MORRIS


This is a major review of the hazards of tobacco smoking, in particular the not inconsiderable hazards for the 'passive smoker'—the non-smoker in contact with a smoke-polluted atmosphere.

The first two chapters cover the constituents of tobacco smoke and their pollutant yields. In the chapter on observed pollution due to cigarette smoke clear evidence of the absorption of nicotine by non-smokers is described. Tests in submarines showed urinary levels of nicotine in non-smokers of about 1% of