The ward plan providing bays for similar age-groups is attractive and so is the idea of making the ward spacious enough for the children who are up to play in, rather than providing a separate play room. It saves a room, makes it easier for the nursing staff to keep an eye on the children and provides entertainment and companionship for the ones who are still confined to bed.

The work has rightly concentrated upon the children's unit attached to a general hospital, since such wards will be a nation-wide requirement, but it is disappointing that more information is not given about children's hospitals which merit more consideration in a book bearing this title. When children are in a unit of a general hospital the practice of transferring them to the adult wards of the specialists whenever they require special treatment will persist, but in a children's hospital the specialists' wards will be children's wards, and the doctors themselves will be specialized paediatricians. Only in such hospitals will there be a sufficient concentration of all the medical and nursing skills to undertake the full investigation and treatment of complex problems of childhood, and only in such places will it be possible to train and teach paediatricians adequately.

It was surely unnecessary, if not presumptuous, for the editor to give a reference to a medical article that expresses a personal clinical belief that can have no influence on hospital planning.


As the title of this monograph indicates, its main concern is with recovery from poliomyelitis; the authors rightly point out that there is a dearth of helpful books on this subject. If I had had a copy of Singer and Rose-Innes in my bag when I went off to deal with my first epidemic of poliomyelitis I should have been a happier and better equipped man. The trouble about a number of the books that have appeared is that they have been written by people who lacked a proper understanding of the disease. Neither of these two authors claims to be an authority on the pathology of poliomyelitis—a difficult subject—but they have prefaced their observations about treatment with a summary of current knowledge that is hard to beat. They have done this so that those faced with an epidemic of poliomyelitis will act rationally, and I am glad that they have put the monograph together in this way; but the opening chapters are so well written that they are worth reading for their own sakes.

The number of cases dealt with by Singer and Rose-Innes in Capetown early in 1957 was only 163; so it was a small, almost gentlemanly affair. In one way this was an advantage because clinicians cannot make the most of their observations if they are overwhelmed with work. There is a disadvantage too. This Capetown outbreak was chicken feed in comparison with, say, Mauritius in 1945, when there were about a thousand cases and Argentina in 1956 when there were two thousand in Buenos Aires alone. In such circumstances improvisation is essential; in Mauritius we had only one physiotherapist, happily an extremely good one, and local people, fortunately keen and intelligent, had to be trained to do the work. It is possible to get by with less equipment and staff than Singer and Rose-Innes had at their disposal. However, the probability now is that since poliomyelitis vaccine, especially the live vaccine, is being used on an ever increasing scale such outbreaks as occur will be small and relatively easily manageable affairs.

Some readers may think that too little is said about respiratory paralysis. It appears that they got off lightly in this Capetown epidemic, but anyway the management of respiratory paralysis is a subject on its own, and it has become so complex that it is best left in the hands of the physicians and anaesthetists who have made a special study of it. There is the excellent book by H. C. A. Lassen, based on his gruelling experiences in Copenhagen, which the publishers have wisely advertised on the back of the dust-cover.

The most awkward part in the management of poliomyelitis in the phase of recovery is stopping treatment. Physiotherapists in their enthusiasm want to go on and the parents of the stricken children find it hard to accept that there is a very strict limit to what can be done. But we know—and Singer and Rose-Innes give the evidence—that there is a remarkably regular graph of recovery that so far as muscle power is concerned comes near to zero by 12 months; and physiotherapy often ceases to be of any value after six months. They mention the difficulties and the importance of making the prognosis clear to parents; but they could have been rather more emphatic about this.

Altogether this is a most valuable book.