

and they often toured Europe (with back-packs, of course) on their way to or from The Spinney. They also went together to Japan and to Israel.

Tom died suddenly while swimming in the mouth of the Sedgefield lagoon in February 1991, and Nellie lived alone at Tom's Corner. Searching for an activity she embarked on a two week trip to mainland China to 'take a look at acupuncture'.

Finally, frustrated by both loneliness and inactivity, she decided in 1992 to move to Cape Town. Albeit now well in the eighties, Nellie could not be idle, especially without the companionship of Tommie whom she missed terribly. She had an ubiquitous philosophy of 'wanting to make a contribution', and her need to 'be useful' was a strong motivational element through her lifetime. Her friends and family remember her best for this drive and urge, and for the substance and fulfilment she achieved in her long life.

Back in Cape Town, there was no reason or need to change the belief: after a handful of other projects, she finally found a niche in the MRC/UCT Liver Research Centre where, after learning microvascular surgery in rats, she became an important member of the team studying the mechanism of the haemodynamic effects of chronic liver disease. The work progressed well and Nellie is co-author on several papers currently in publication.

She attended a medical congress in Cairo, Egypt, as a representative of the Centre only 3 weeks before she died. Typically, she attended an above average proportion of the academic procedures and still found the time and energy to ride a camel. Her drive, enthusiasm, continued curiosity and above all her interest in and affection for her fellow human beings were an inspiration to us all. We treasure the time she spent with us and miss her dearly.

Books

Alternative Medicine. A Doctor's Perspective

By Desmond Pantanowitz. R34,99. Halfway House: Southern Book Publishers. 1994. ISBN 1-86812-482-7.

Alternative Medicine, Complementary Medicine, call it what you will, is one of the more interesting phenomena of the latter part of the 20th century. There is no doubt at all that scientifically-based medicine has achieved spectacular successes, which in theory should surely have convinced anybody that this is the route to go, but dissatisfaction with the orthodox model of medicine has probably never been greater than it is at present. Like it or not, people are looking for something else from their healers — the missing dimension which unorthodox approaches often seem to provide. As Pantanowitz himself admits, writing a book like this is far from easy and is akin to picking one's way through a minefield. Unfortunately, he hasn't managed to avoid stepping on a few mines *en route*.

What was his purpose in writing this book (which is intended for the general public rather than the medical

profession)? Was it to provide a reasoned assessment of these therapies from a basis of sound knowledge? Or was it a debunking exercise? And has he got his facts right? The answer appears to be both yes and no, because he seems to be reasonably accurate about some things but ludicrously wrong about others, and writing a book about things which you do not believe in yourself demands an attention to facts and detail even greater than when writing a book about a subject with which you are totally familiar.

For instance, I do not know where he got his 'facts' about Anthroposophical Medicine which bear no resemblance at all to the facts as I know them. For a start, it was not Rudolf Steiner who described the three morphologic types which he refers to (ectomorphic, mesomorphic and endomorphic), it was William Sheldon, and they have nothing to do with Anthroposophical Medicine. The chakras have to do with Ayurvedic Medicine and not Anthroposophical Medicine, and to say that Rudolf Steiner sucked the information out of his thumb is to display an ignorance of Steiner and his methodology which is breathtaking in its inaccuracy and ignorance. Steiner was a trained scientist and philosopher, and his main claim to fame is that he viewed man as a being of body, soul and spirit, and devised a methodology (Spiritual Science) based on a Goethean rather than Cartesian approach to science to investigate the entire phenomenology of human existence. Also, phrases like 'sounds quite crazy to me' when talking about Applied Kinesiology do not quite create an impression of the honest academic seeker-after-truth which one would expect in a booklet of this kind.

Where Pantanowitz is quite right of course is in sounding warning bells about accepting the whole spectrum of 'Alternative Medicine' uncritically. There is no doubt that lurking among the wheat is a great deal of chaff, and trying to sort out one from the other can be far from easy. If this book could help people to do so, then it would have performed a valuable service, but I am afraid that the author's prejudices and inaccuracies are a major shortcoming.

N. C. Lee

The ALLSA Handbook of Practical Allergy.

Ed. by Paul C. Potter. 1st ed. Pp. 224. Illustrated. Cape Town: Allergy Society of South Africa and Sandton: Janssen Pharmaceutica. 1994

Not many publications can claim to have almost every expert in the country as a contributing author, but this one can do so. Looking at the index, one can find information on all types of allergies and their aetiologies. The articles stop short at detailed biochemistry and physiology, but a brief review of pathogenesis is included.

The Editor obviously held a very tight rein on his authors, because the subjects are presented in a manner designed to make the articles as practical as possible.

The first contribution is, sensibly, the investigation of the allergic patient. Buys provides practical guidelines, and the article is supplemented with a flow chart and description of the various steps in the appendices to the main text.

The excellent article on allergic rhinitis by Eugene Weinberg, doyen of South African allergists — well-written, factual and concise — is marred by some sloppy sub-editing, but this may only slightly offend perfectionists like me.

Food allergy and intolerance are given good coverage by Motala and Steinman, with detailed lists of sources of the allergens including caffeine, monosodium glutamate and preservatives. The allergic skin conditions are presented by Cas Motala; diagnosis, clinical features and management are comprehensive, but the sub-editing again leaves something to be desired.

Immunotherapy (IT) is still controversial, and the problems with its acceptance are acknowledged by Weinberg. He presents, however, a list of strict criteria and approaches to IT. Particularly useful are his '10 commandments for immunotherapy'.

When dealing with asthma, which forms a large part of the text, an indication of the currency of the book is the inclusion of guidelines for the management of chronic childhood and adolescent asthma, which was only published in the December issue of the SAMJ. Consensus statements for the management of acute childhood and adult asthma are also included, giving an overview of approaches to all forms of asthma.

Occupational asthma deserves and receives special mention, because of the medico-legal implications of the condition. The article by Ehrlich and Jeebhay covers both medical and legal procedures and leave one in no doubt as to the steps to be followed.

Prevention of allergy from the points of view of assessment of patients, and control of environmental factors, are dealt with by Matt Haus and Ahmed Manjra respectively. Haus's article focuses on the identification of high-risk individuals, starting with the foetus and proceeding age-wise from there through infancy and childhood. Sensible and logical preventive measures are succinctly outlined. Manjra concentrates on factors such as the house dust mite, moulds and pollens, with practical hints for exposure avoidance.

An extensive pharmacopoeia and reference pages for diagnostic procedures, tests, reference values and much more, appear at the end of the book.

This pocket-size book contains a wealth of information for anyone faced with an allergic patient. Its main value lies in the fact that (except for the one on adult asthma — 24 pages) none of the articles is long and the facts are presented in easily readable and digestible form. The practitioner having to make a decision about a patient will find information fast, and this book could even possibly be referred to while the patient is in the consulting room. Considering the calibre of the writers, practitioners need have no compunction in following the guidelines presented, and they can be sure that their patients will receive the best possible treatment if the suggested procedures are followed.

The final (and for some the most attractive) feature is that the book is obtainable free from Janssen Pharmaceutica. Orders are being taken by Dave Hines, Product Manager: Livostin, Janssen Pharmaceutica, tel. (011) 883-4331.

F. N. Sanders

Assessing Elderly People in Hospital and Community Care

Ed. by Ian Philp. Pp. xiv + 152. Figures & tables. £14.95. London: Farrand Press. 1994. ISBN 1-85083-034-7.

This booklet provides up-to-date evaluations of the most widely validated screening instruments that are used in geriatric medicine. It is good value for money and may be of use to those interested in setting up a database to determine the health and welfare needs of geriatric patients, either in the community or in hospital-based practice.

Several authors are epidemiologists or health economists and the flavour of the book is a careful, matter-of-fact evaluation of screening instruments. An early chapter deals with the 'over-75 health screen' which is now commonly used by general practitioners in the UK. Other chapters deal with comparative evaluations of instruments used for cognitive screening, detecting depression, evaluating activities of daily living and perceived well being. An interesting section deals with screening instruments that may be used to assess caregivers stress/strain. Most authors select the two or three most widely validated instruments and describe their attributes in tabular form. They then go on to identify their choice ('best bet') and defend their selection.

A shortcoming is that cross-cultural evaluations of the instruments are not specifically discussed: an underlying assumption is that the population under study will be English speaking with European cultural values and wealth. Nonetheless, the booklet does contain the most widely used instruments and the discussion, from the health systems and epidemiological perspective (cost-effectiveness, validity, sensitivity, etc.), is fairly disciplined and could serve as an appropriate springboard for anyone wishing to design similar instruments for this southern African setting.

Stephen Louw

Understanding Financial Statements

By Errol C. Velleman. Pp. 107. R68.40. Greytown. Pracfin Publications. 1993. ISBN 0-620-18499-X.

Previously, medical practice was seen as only treating patients to the best of our ability and hoping the financial aspects will sort themselves out. I am glad to hear, however, that these days, medical schools do teach the students practice management as well as basic accounting principles. As we progress in this ever changing health care industry, it becomes of the utmost importance for us to run our practices on sound business principles. This we can only achieve if we understand the basic information we get from our accountants.

This book, written by Errol C. Velleman, is easy to read and understand. It explains a number of essential business management principles in an interesting and simplistic manner. Some of the important principles include: reasons for understanding financial statements, the difference between bookkeeping and accounting, the accounting cycle and periods, how profits and losses are arrived at (income statement), how profits and losses are apportioned (income

appropriation statement), what is owned and who owns it (balance sheet) as well as to where the money has gone (cash flow statement). For the doctors dispensing, there is a chapter on buying and selling merchandise, which explains the difference between gross margin as a percentage of cost of sales and gross margin as a percentage of sales. For the more adventurous, there is a chapter on financial ratios explaining how to utilise the profitability, liquidity and leverage ratios. Although we do not have industry standards we can at least assess ourselves historically.

This publication explains the principles of financial statements in a form which is interesting and easy to understand. If you do not understand financial statements, it is worth spending R68,40.

Paul Theron