

## Book reviews

**Sexually Transmitted Diseases: The Facts.** David Barlow, 1979. Pp 140, 8 figs. Oxford University Press, Oxford (£4.50).

This book on sexually transmitted diseases will be of great interest to a wide range of readers, including health educators and those in other health professions. It provides current factual knowledge on the main venereal diseases and on a variety of infections and infestations transmitted sexually.

Several sections of the book have special appeal. In the chapter on "Sexual anatomy and function" there are excellent illustrations with a readable text, including an important section on variations in sexual behaviour. In this and in other chapters dealing with specific infections, reference is made to homosexuality and the prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases in this group.

The chapter on "History and development of a service" provides educationalists

with an excellent basis for inclusion in any programme on this particular aspect of human relationships. This section concludes with the evolution of clinical services in this country, which are recognised to be the best in the world. The author helpfully provides a complete list of clinics in the United Kingdom at the very end of the book.

The section on tropical diseases is an important addition to any book on sexually transmitted diseases, as it contains valuable information on the increasing minority of ethnic grouping in urban areas of this country and on the Continent.

Chapters on each of the infections contain a wealth of information on signs, symptoms, treatment, and incidence of the respective infections. The lay reader may well need to refer to the glossary of clinical terms provided by the author at the back of the book.

Details are given on the location of clinics, their staffing, confidentiality, and

treatment, which, I am sure, will help to overcome the stigma of attending a hospital for treatment of diseases of a sexual nature. This will be useful for young people, who are considered to be a high-risk group.

The author finally discusses control and various factors which he considers will help to curb the worldwide increase in these diseases.

The amusing cartoons by Dickinson provide a good counter-balance to the superb medical illustrations in the book.

I consider that this book will be a welcome addition to libraries in schools, colleges for further education, teaching hospitals, as well as in health education units, health centres, and medical group practices. It may well be useful for copies to be sent to the Gay Liberation Movement and to the Campaign for Homosexual Equality.

G Peters

**Boswell's Clap and Other Essays: Medical Analyses of Literary Men's Afflictions.** William B Ober, 1979. Pp 291, 10 figs. Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale and Edwardsville, Feffer and Simons, London and Amsterdam (US\$17.50).

It is a pity that this title has been chosen for such a recondite collection of superb essays, attracting the voyeur in many a physician browsing in a medical bookshop. Dr W Ober, a histopathologist, has been recognised for many years as a leading American medical historian coming from the school of scholar-philosophers found on the eastern seaboard. He takes 10 literary figures or groups; Boswell, Swinbourne, D H Lawrence, John Keats and George Crabbe, Collins, Cowper and Smart, Chekhov, William Carlos Williams, the Earl of Rochester, Thomas Shadwell, and Socrates, and analyses aspects of their lives, using the skills of his speciality. In this

process he makes some remarkable, but probably correct, diagnoses, often backed by psychopathological arguments. His groundwork cannot be faulted, taking into consideration literary and historical published work as well as primary sources. Venereologists will find not only the title essay illuminating but also a great deal of interest in psychosexual pathology in at least half the other essays, notably those on Swinbourne, Keats, D H Lawrence, and the Earl of Rochester.

Ober details 19 instances of urethritis, mostly probably gonococcal in origin in Boswell's life between the age of 19 and 50, an attack of crab lice, and one of genital sores, probably not syphilitic. What seems most interesting are the psychological reasons for Boswell's repeated infections, despite—in latter years—a constant wife and his frequent visits to a succession of medical men. Not only did he consult surgeons no longer remembered but also doctors who are celebrated today:

Morgagni in Padua, Pott in London, as well as Pringle and Gregory in Edinburgh.

An early example of contact-tracing is when Boswell paid for the treatment at St Thomas's Hospital of Betsey Smith, a prostitute from whom he contracted gonorrhoea in 1785. It is also worth remembering in these days of easy treatment the fate of Boswell, dying at 55 of uraemia, the result of acute and chronic urinary tract infection secondary to postgonococcal urethral stricture.

Michael Waugh

## Correction

In the paper by Dr K C Nayyar *et al* on the "Rising incidence of chancroid in Rotterdam" (1979;55:439-41) the figure in the last line of the fourth paragraph of the section on patients and methods should have been 7.4% and not 77%.