

Book review

A book about sexually transmitted diseases.
By D Cherniak, 1983. Montreal Health Press, Montreal, Canada. Pp 52.

In 1972 the Montreal Health Press published a "VD Handbook" which was widely distributed throughout North America. Changing social mores as well as advances in the microbiology of infection suggested the need for a replacement publication. In "A book about sexually transmitted diseases" the Montreal Health Press has attempted to provide an up to date and wide ranging discussion of the sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), covering society's attitudes to sex and sexuality, as well as the microbiology and management of individual infections. It has assumed a certain amount of basic knowledge among potential readers, but appears to have occasional doubts about when to simplify medical terminology—for instance, to provide a specimen of urine a woman should "urinate" but to try to prevent urinary tract infection she should "pee frequently and often". The resulting publication is a bit like the curate's egg. It is not helped by its appearance. The magazine format, with pages of typescript relieved by frequent and irrelevant black and white photographs, gives the impression that the finances available for this project were strictly limited.

Despite the unpromising appearance, the first few chapters are really rather good. A check list of common symptoms and their possible causes is followed by sections on STDs and sexuality, understanding infections, prevention and self care, dealing with an STD, and basic anatomy. These are all clear and well written and give, along with accurate information, practical and detailed advice. Some of this is applicable only to North America, but most of it would be useful on both sides of the Atlantic. The author deals with basic principles of infection and infectious diseases, and discusses what steps people can usefully take to minimise risks, including changing sexual behaviour. The chapter on "dealing with an STD" describes the medical examination of the patient in some detail with the help of drawings and diagrams. Young people often worry unnecessarily about what will happen to them during the examination, and information given like this can only be reassuring. Occasional lapses into modern sociopolitical jargon in no way diminish the value of these sections.

The success of the first part of the book serves to highlight the failure of the second, in which the author describes the diagnosis and management of individual infections. Some sections, such as the one on gonorrhoea, seem old fashioned and minatory and dwell heavily on the complications of

untreated infection. Some confusion arises over diagnostic procedures, such as when the author implies that laparoscopy may be used routinely in the diagnosis of gonorrhoea. There are also numerous microbiological errors, most noticeable in the chapter on chlamydial infection. *Chlamydia trachomatis* is not an intermediate organism, the clinical appearance of the cervix is not a good indicator of chlamydial infection, and chlamydia should not be assumed to be the cause of urethritis if Gram negative diplococci are not present in a urethral smear.

The other sexually transmitted diseases are dealt with rather more accurately, although treatment regimens of course reflect North American practice. Patients presenting with genital symptoms may have conditions other than STDs; the inclusion of information about vaginitis, prostatitis and urinary tract infection is helpful.

This small publication contains a great deal of information about sexually transmitted diseases and their implications for the individual and for society. Many medical textbooks contain rather less. Greater medical accuracy would have made "A book about sexually transmitted diseases" even more useful.

J M Hunter

Corrections

One of the authors of the paper on syphilis, hepatitis A, hepatitis B, and cytomegalovirus infection in homosexual men in Antwerp (1984;60:48-51), Dr C-H Coester, undertook the work at the Institut für Medizinische Mikrobiologie, Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin, West Germany as well as at the Institute of Tropical Medicine, Antwerp.

Work for the paper on the effect of syphilitic rabbit serum on treponemal motility, attachment to mammalian cells in vitro, and infection in rabbits (1983;59:220-4) was undertaken at the Department of Microbiology, Monash University Medical School, Alfred Hospital, Prahan, Victoria, Australia and not at the two institutions cited.