

Book reviews

Handbook on Contact Tracing in Sexually Transmitted Diseases. By Isobel Hunter, John Jacobs, Hilary Kinnell, and Ann Satin, 1980. The Health Education Council, London. Pp 168. Price £5.00.

The importance of contact tracing in the control of sexually transmitted disease has been recognised for many years. The principle of including workers with special responsibilities for contact tracing in the staff of clinics has only developed over the last 20 years in Britain. These workers have come from a wide variety of backgrounds. They learned their work initially by trial and error, and recently new entrants have been taught by experienced workers during brief attachments. For several years there have been efforts to provide more formal training and this handbook is one product of these efforts. Although published by the Health Education Council, much of the stimulus has come from the Department of Health and Social Security, especially from the advisers to the Chief Medical Officer, Dr C S Nicol and Dr R D Catterall.

The book is remarkably comprehensive and succeeds admirably in the difficult dual

role of providing information in a readable form for the newcomer and of acting as a reference book for the experienced worker. There is a clear, concise account of the more important infections and the implications for contact tracing. There is a good description of a clinic and how the patient proceeds through it from reception onwards.

The record-card system for contacts is explained in one section of the book. This system was devised early in the research programme that led to the writing of this handbook. As the book states, several reliable systems exist but this one serves particularly well for keeping track of patients and contacts and for analysing results.

The section on actual interviewing is perhaps a little forbidding for the newcomer and the wording used for the five objectives of the contact-tracing interview could be simplified with advantage in subsequent editions.

In the section on "Action to secure the attendance of contacts" more emphasis could be given to the importance of contacts attending either with a contact slip, and producing it on arrival rather than at

some later stage, or knowing the vital details on it. In view of the number of hours and telephone calls that are wasted daily if the contact forgets this information, perhaps the importance of this cannot be overemphasised. Another important point worth mentioning is that time and energy will be saved if the patient's clinic is informed as soon as a contact attends another clinic. The variety of useful tips on visiting a contact reflect the experience of the team of authors.

The book also provides useful appendices, such as lists for further reading, useful organisations, and the latest list of STD clinics in Britain.

The handbook must obviously be available in all sexually transmitted disease and genitourinary medicine clinics in Britain for contact tracers. It should also be read by all the other staff for background information and so they may help the contact tracers in their work. While the handbook is intended primarily for use in this country, it will be of value to all those who treat patients with sexually transmitted disease and who understand English.

R N Thin

Notice

IUVDT Conference—New Zealand, 1981

The South-east Asian and Western Pacific Region of the International Union against the Venereal Diseases and Treponematoses are holding a second regional meeting at Christchurch Clinical School, Christchurch Hospital, Christchurch, New Zealand, from 23 October to 26 October 1981.

The proposed themes, with special emphasis on regional problems, will include: the changing pattern of drug resistance of the gonococcus (with special reference to β -lactamase-producers) and its effect on treatment and control; the rising tide of viral STDs; recent problems with the control of syphilis; the arguments for and against a laboratory service for the diagnosis of chlamydia; and obstetric venereology.

Among the overseas speakers will be Dr R D Catterall of London (president of the IUVDT) and notable speakers from the USA and Singapore. Anyone wishing to attend or present a paper or both should address inquiries to: IUVDT Conference, Postgraduate Office, Medical Centre, Christchurch Hospital, Christchurch, New Zealand.

References—continued from p 148.

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