**Book Reviews**

*The Kaleidoscope of Care: A Review of Research on Welfare Provision for Elderly People*

I. Sinclair, R. Parker, D. Leaf and J. Williams (National Institute for Social Work)  

A character reference for starters. So absorbed was I reading this book on a train that I emulated Marie Lloyd's infamous manoeuvre, whereby she wanted to go to Birmingham, and they put her off at Crewe. The journey was shorter and more humdrum, and it was not spiced with Marie Lloyd's tuneful and Freudian inferences about trains and junctions. Still, the enforced return trip offered more time for reading more of a most solid and comprehensive publication.

It deals very completely with all aspects of the welfare and care of older people, and it is as detailed in its treatment of influential perspectives, such as social, financial and health dimensions. The several expert and distinguished authors have, apropos of this vital issue, delivered an erudite volume which, in another time and place, might have been sub-titled 'inquire within upon everything'.

Gradually, a matrix of types of provision and types of provider are analysed from many angles. It is dispassionately and unpolemically achieved. The authors keep their scholarly cool under what some might imagine to be the most provocative of circumstances. It may occasionally be too rational, with too little acceptance of the dreadful happenstance and mindless accident of, historically, much social policy. Because of that, social policy-makers must be prepared to acknowledge waste as well as lack of funds. None the less, by and large, it sustains the momentum of its wonderfully descriptive title. Welfare policies for older people do resemble a kaleidoscope, and, as the authors firmly conclude in the final paragraph, shake the kaleidoscope how you will, and whatever pretty patterns might emerge, the outcome must, unsurprisingly, rest on the provision of resources.

This is an authoritative and magisterial tome: we wait in trepidation for an answer to the essential question: will politicians and other decision-makers heed authorities and magistrates?

**Eric Midwinter**  
Centre for Policy on Ageing, London

*Clinical Epidemiology of Stroke*

Shah Ebrahim  
Price £25.00.

What caused it? Will he get better? How long will it take? Will he have another one? What can be done to prevent it? Does it run in families? These are among the questions which relatives ask about stroke patients, and which doctors find very difficult to answer. And doctors have their own embarrassments. How is a haemorrhage to be distinguished from a thrombosis? Does treating hypertension really prevent strokes? Should all stroke patients be given anti-platelet medication or beta blockers? Should they have CT scans? Is Bobath (misspelled in this book) better than Brunnstrom? In this short, richly documented book Professor Ebrahim tackles these and many other practical questions from the standpoint of clinical epidemiology, and breaks new ground in doing so. It is not so much a book as an education for those who rely solely on 'clinical experience' to guide their management of patients. In a splendid introductory chapter on the scope of clinical epidemiology, and in eleven subsequent chapters on diagnosis, management and prognosis, Professor Ebrahim leads the reader gently through a vast literature (there are more than twenty pages of references), and demonstrates again and again how improperly designed or incorrectly analysed studies lead to inconclusive, contradictory or misleading results; while trustworthy conclusions can be drawn from studies which adhere to the principles which he enunciates. Each chapter concludes with four or five reliable items of advice which can be drawn from the published data. Professor Ebrahim's book is a model of the wise application of science to clinical practice.

**Bernard Isaacs**  
Retired Geriatrician, Jerusalem

*Emotional Problems in Later Life: Intervention Strategies for Professional Caregivers*

Dan Blazer  
Price US $29.95 (hardback).

This compact book attempts in less than 300 pages to summarize the biological, social and psychological
contributions to the main emotional problems encountered by the ageing population. That daunting task is achieved with some success but with a certain amount of confusion. At a superficial level it is a good summary of current opinion and philosophy, but by attempting to appeal to such a wide audience it fails to satisfy any part of it completely. The simplistic language and case illustrations are interspersed by overcomplicated hypotheses and medical information which make simple concepts difficult to grasp at a first reading.

Although aimed at American health professionals dealing with the expectations of an American population it gives insights which can be easily applied to any group of elderly people and their families. The chapter on emotional problems associated with physical illness is particularly good, as it covers not just major psychological disturbance but the less severe reactions which often cause the most disruptions to the elderly population as a whole. Opinions on the use of specific drugs are definite, particularly some enthusiasm for benzodiazepines and L-tryptophan, the latter now withdrawn in the UK and the use of the former a topic of debate and controversy.

A book worth reading but probably not to be returned to as a source of reference or guidance for specific management problems.

**Denise Cope**

Senior Registrar in Old Age Psychiatry, Southampton

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**Gender, Health and Longevity: Multidisciplinary Perspectives**

Edited by M. G. Ory and H. R. Warner, with the assistance of Jacquelyn Scarville


This book is based on two 1987 USA symposia, and the widely differing interests of the eighteen contributors ensure that the approaches really are multidisciplinary. Splendidly, however, none of these modern scientists can solve the problems which our Creator must have had great fun in devising: Why do women live longer than men (though they have more minor illnesses) when their biological fitness disappears at about the age of 50? Why, though 105 boys are born to 100 girls, do the males begin dying in excess as soon as they leave the womb? Why do over 50% of conceptuses never see the light of day?—over millions of years natural selection ought to have made fertilization more efficient. Why, with the immensely complicated human organs which have evolved, has there not also evolved a mechanism for keeping the cells in good repair?—it is well known that some unicellular organisms are immortal. The usual explanations are given and for me there are two interesting new ones, both relating to our famous Mary Lyon. Reactivation of genes on the inactivated X chromosome may occur late in life (Smith and Warner) and this might be beneficial to females. On the other hand, lethal embryonic aberrations in X-inactivation might explain the male excess at birth (Gartler).

Later on, since inactivation must be maintained at each cell division, there are more possibilities for change in females and this could give an advantage over males with their single X. It has in fact been demonstrated in mosaics that there is cell selection for the normal character in women heterozygous for a X-linked gene.

The more practical aspects of the book deal with how to cope with the increasing number of old people, their impact on the health services, and on the stress caused to middle-aged women by the multiple roles which they now often play. Not enough emphasis however is laid on the main cause of increasing longevity, which is the reduction in infant mortality, resulting in knock-on effects in each decade.