



## Book Reviews

### **The Greatest Benefit to Mankind**

Edited by Roy Porter

*Publisher: Harper Collins, 1997. 831pp. £24.99.*

*ISBN 0 00 215173 1*

It is a very strange thing that despite the fact that medicine advances in almost every possible aspect with new treatments appearing, new technology and with people being healthier and living longer than ever before, few people today feel happy about their doctors or about their personal health. We are all bombarded with medical news, mostly of a scare mongering type. Even the so-called 'serious' newspapers devote whole pages to alternative medicine of a particular dubious type.

This excellent book explores and discusses diseases, patients and physicians from a global viewpoint. The emergence of medical beliefs in health practice is discussed together with the rise of formal written medicine in the Middle East, Egypt, Greece and Rome. Islamic, Indian and Chinese medicine are all dealt with although the emphasis is understandably on Western Medicine. Does the spread of Western Medicine rely on political and economic domination or is it the other way round? Either way it is truly global presumably because it 'works' and is the medicine of humanity.

The sub-title of the book is 'A medical history of humanity from antiquity to the present' and the author takes us through medicine from its roots to the modern day. This includes the inter-relationship between medicine, state and society, but it also includes the fact that modern medicine, though enabling us to live longer and healthier lives, also encompasses the abominations of the holocaust and the Gulags in which doctors played an unseemly and revolting part.

The book is well illustrated and well presented. The final chapter on 'the past, the present and the future', is too short but perhaps suggests that the author has even more up his sleeve. I hope so, because this is quite literally an outstanding book. It is remarkably good value and is strongly recommended for everyone's bookshelf.

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### **'Furniture'**

Authors: RC Clevely, KM Baxendale, AD Kelsall, GM Cochrane

*Published by The Disability Information Trust 1997*

This book is part of a series of thirteen, published by the Disability Information Trust to provide independent, unbiased information on equipment. It provides information on furniture and accessories designed to be practical but aesthetically pleasing for those with physical difficulties. It should help them, their carers and professionals involved in their care in making informed choices based on individual requirements.

It does not aim to provide an exhaustive list of the equipment available or the suppliers from whom the products are available, but covers furniture for most domestic rooms, safety aspects, prices and methods available for receiving financial assistance. It advises on many 'points to consider' for the selection process and gives useful information in sizes and weights, etc., for the products illustrated.

The publication is directed towards allied health personnel involved such as Occupational Therapists, carers and those involved with manual handling. It has a logical A4 format, is easy to obtain the required information and shows good 'in use' photographs of some of the products.

It is a useful assessment tool for researching an item of equipment for an individual without giving a biased viewpoint. It gives advice upon, and supplements other literature available on the subject, and in view of this, is a worthy purchase to complement such literature.

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