

BOOK REVIEWS

charter in 1800. Perhaps the separation between the specialties was not as extreme as we are often led to believe.

This history is a small part of metropolitan medicine, but we must be grateful to David Hay for spanning more than two centuries including interesting biographies of its past and present members. This book and the earlier companion volume are both most readable and I recommend them to anyone interested in dipping into the history of medicine.

SIR RICHARD THOMPSON
Treasurer
Royal College of Physicians, London

Reference

- 1 Book reviews. *Clin Med* 2002;2:78–9.

Oral care in advanced disease

Edited by Andrew Davies and Ilora Finlay. Oxford University Press, Oxford 2005. 233pp. £39.95.

Oral problems are very common in patients with advanced disease, but they are often poorly managed, particularly in the acute hospital setting, making effective oral care crucially important. Despite this, this excellent and authoritative new text is the first book to look specifically at oral care in advanced disease and is a very welcome addition to our library. The book covers the spectrum of oral care in patients with cancer and other life-threatening conditions, including HIV/AIDS and chronic neurological problems.

This book is edited by two eminent palliative care physicians and has contributions from dentists and clinicians that are leaders in their fields. However, despite its emphasis on the role of the multi-professional team in managing oral problems in advanced disease, few contributions are from non-medical or dentistry professionals, potentially making some of the text less accessible to other health-care professionals. Although one chapter is dedicated to oral problems in patients with advanced neurological disorders, for example, it is disappointing not to also see contributions from speech and language therapists and dietitians. Despite this, this text does generally emphasise a multidisciplinary approach to oral care, including the role of the dentist as an extended member of the palliative care team, which is to be welcomed.

This book is comprehensive and informative. Many of the chapters are written in an accessible style, combining a review of the evidence with practical advice, eg the chapters on oral assessment, oral care and fungal infections. The oral hygiene chapter is particularly useful, giving clear and practical information on effective oral hygiene and denture care, with a helpful section on oral care in the terminal phase. Diagrams and illustrative pictures add to the 'user friendly' style of the book. We found some chapters were, however, more theoretical and less accessible to medical audiences, such as that on periodontal disease, although it contains useful reference information.

As palliative care specialists, the chapters on symptom control are of particular interest, such as those on salivary gland dysfunction and taste disturbance. Both chapters clearly review the available evidence for common and new management strategies and are up-

to-date and informative. For those who, like us, work in an acute hospital setting and regularly see patients with severe chemotherapy-related mucositis, the clear and concise chapter on oral pain, with its focus on local rather than systemic treatments, is very welcome, as is the section on mucositis in the chapter on oral complications of cancer treatment. Many of the contents of this specific chapter, however, are repetitive – the topics are covered in more detail in other chapters (eg on salivary gland dysfunction). In general, we would also have found clear management guidelines in a table or box at the end of the chapters useful, as these would have been easily accessible to a busy reader dipping into the text.

We enjoyed reading this book and feel that most readers would find their knowledge and management of oral care improved if they used this book. Although it is too detailed as a quick reference guide, it will be an excellent and much needed resource for clinicians in clinical practice and aid support the development of local oral care guidelines.

POLLY EDMONDS
Consultant in Palliative Medicine, King's College Hospital

DAVID BARCLAY
SpR in Palliative Medicine, King's College Hospital