

## Reviews

**Drinking Problems: Information and Advice for the Individual, Family and Friends** by Jo Chick and Jonathan Chick. Patient Handbook 19. Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone. 1984. Pp 85. £1.75.

There appears to be a range of self-help books developing in fields relating to alcohol use. This volume is one of a well-established series dealing with health matters. The authors, who are from social work and psychiatric backgrounds respectively, have special experience in the field of drinking problems.

This book is really wider than just a self-examination of drinking and drinking problems and their solution, because it also looks at related topics such as coping with worry, tension, depression, etc. In a very clear and simple way it examines what are drinking problems, the meaning of dependence, the special vulnerability of women to certain aspects of drinking problems, methods to overcome such problems in both sexes, the effect that family and marriage undergo when one partner has a drinking problem and the best type of advice that relatives or friends can give. It also gives recommendations on how to receive advice if this is required and the sort of help available. As stated above, it also looks at other related topics.

It is admirably clear, easy to read and extremely sensible. It rightly puts the responsibility for an individual's drinking on that person and in no way diminishes the potential seriousness of this condition. However, the spirit of the book is an extremely positive one, perhaps summed up best by the final sentences in the book; 'Never give up trying to find your solution. The odds are in your favour.'

A minor criticism would appear to be in the illustrations, some of which are cartoons which appear more sophisticated than the level of the text and some other illustrations, because of small print, are difficult to read.

This is an admirable and excellent self-help volume which, however, does not diminish the value of professional help. Whilst it is not primarily for professionals working in the alcohol problems field, it would be extremely useful to recommend to patients as a way of them helping themselves not only to monitor and alter their drinking habits but to improve their life style generally and also for them to decide when they require professional help.

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**Staying at Home: Helping Elderly People** by Anthea Tinker. London: HMSO. Pp 191. 1984. £9.50.

Most elderly people, and those involved with them and planning for their care, would stress the desirability of their staying in their own homes as long as possible, even in the face

of advancing disability. The last few years have seen a number of often exciting innovations aimed at sustaining such home care, some of which have been compiled for more general information. There is less clarity, however, as to the range of disability for which these schemes are most appropriate or effective and as to how far they can constitute real alternatives to residential care for the very frail, and at what cost.

This book is a major contribution along these lines. It brings together research sponsored over the last six years by the Department of the Environment into a range of community care innovations by Housing and Social Services Departments. It describes eight schemes in particular which represent different aspects of this spectrum and presents the findings of a survey of 1,300 clients sampled from them. The survey looked at the dependency levels of the clients and their perception of the services received. It also examined in detail the input of care from the schemes themselves and from other social and health services and obtained views as to the efficacy of the innovations from those working in them and those in the back-up services. The cost of maintaining clients in the schemes was examined very thoroughly in terms of their dependency levels, taking into account the input from other services and the 'hidden' costs of pensions, social security benefits, capital expenditure, etc. The discussion of the complexity of elements which need to be included to make valid cost comparisons was valuable in its own right and the author stressed the dangers of superficial comparison and the importance of joint planning of innovations in this field of community care.

The schemes studied fell into three main types: alarm systems; the bolstering up of community support by good neighbour schemes and visiting wardens; the use of paid carers for very disabled clients in their own homes. The last of these was probably the most effective alternative to residential care for the very dependent, though at a comparable total cost if social security payments were included. The more sophisticated of the alarm schemes were also able to make life alone viable for some very dependent people. Heavy social and health service input was needed as well but the total package often cost less than residential care, especially at the lower dependency levels (which have fed much of the recent Rest Home boom). Good neighbour schemes were cheaper still but variable in their effectiveness and their ratings by clients and supporters.

It is difficult in the space available here to do justice to the amount of information presented in this book (indeed the range of tables and figures was a little over-whelming). Nevertheless, it takes the discussion of options for the frail elderly a large step forward as well as offering a glimpse of some very interesting schemes and useful advice for local as well as national planners.

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