Although the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys states that these should not be accepted by the Registrar of Births and Deaths, they often are. Among their other values, hospital post mortem examinations provide a setting where death certification is discussed and pathologists can instruct clinicians on this subject. The falling necropsy rate, reaching 5% in our hospital, suggests that inaccuracies in death certification will become commoner, increasing the need for formal undergraduate teaching of this subject. Accordingly, we contacted all undergraduate pathology departments in England and Wales and asked them if death certification featured in their curriculum. Most already teach this subject, usually as part of forensic medicine. However, three of 19 respondents indicated that no such teaching was given. With the declining necropsy rate, the opportunities to redress this deficiency will decline. We suggest that all undergraduate pathology departments examine their teaching of death certification and if necessary introduce it, as requested, some years ago by the Registrar General.

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1 Leadbetter S, Knight B. Anomalies and ambiguities in the disposal of the dead. *J Roy Coll Phys Lond* 1986;20:273-5.

(very reasonably) that one should be clear about the difference between a plan for improving the NHS and a plan for improving the nation's health, and opines that the Green Paper is muddled on this point. The Group is followed by eminent experts in several clinical, political, and management fields who give their various views about what is missing from the consultative document and what would be done if they had their way, most of which is pretty predictable.

What can be said of the whole? On the positive side it is interesting, easy to read, and a good source of quotable health care statistics with which to amaze and fascinate your friends. On the negative side, despite the subtitle, it has no cohesive viewpoint and tends to meander. It is also rather sobering in some ways. For me it generated the worrying but irrepressible image of a population of well nourished, well housed, financially secure centenarians gently degenerating without specific disease. Is that utopia?

J S LILLEYMAN

Gastrointestinal Pathology and its Clinical Implications. Vols I and II. K J Lewin, R H Riddell, W M Weinstein. (Pp 1395; \$295.) Igaku-Shoin Medical Publishers, Inc. 1992. ISBN 0-89640-153-7

Gastroenterology has always derived particular benefit from close cooperation between clinicians and pathologists. This important theme is meticulously explored in this impressive two volume book which brings together a vast amount of updated clinical and pathological data relating to the gastrointestinal tract, including the oesophagus. The well organised text is embellished by numerous illustrations almost exclusively in colour as well as many well constructed tables. The cooperative theme is further developed by a series of perceptive recommendations to pathologists faced with the interpretation of gastrointestinal biopsy specimens and also by illustrative case reports. The authors have not refrained from expressing personal views, which, although at times controversial, are certainly stimulating and informative. This is not, however, a book to be taken up lightly, and the discursive style does not always make for easy reference. All the same, most of the important aspects of gastrointestinal pathology are tackled with confidence and few of the sections could be bettered. While expensive, this book is lavishly illustrated and comprehensively documented. Its value as a major reference text for both clinical and pathological gastroenterologists cannot therefore be seriously doubted.

F D LEE

Basic Histopathology. A Colour Atlas and Text. 2nd ed. (Pp 252; £24.95.) Churchill Livingstone. 1991. ISBN 0-443-04237-3

The aim of this book is to introduce histopathology to medical and dental students who are covering pathology in the pre-clinical or clinical course. In many centres there is less emphasis on practical microscopic histopathology, with a higher proportion of course work on understanding the theory of

mechanisms in disease. However, this book would still be a useful supplement to a less practical course in view of the well presented and concise text, illustrated with clinical examples. Over one third of the book covers basic pathological processes, and this would be the most useful part of the book for more theoretical pre-clinical course work. Subjects such as inflammation, neoplasia, atherosclerosis, and other vascular disorders are particularly well presented.

The use of photomicrographs is of most value in the section of the book covering systemic pathology. Large colour plates are used and are of excellent quality. Some of the low power views, always the most difficult to produce, are unfortunately rather blurred. All the photomicrographs are supplemented with adjacent text.

The book assumes a good knowledge of the normal histology of organs and tissues, and without this the full benefit of the book will be missed. This second edition will be a very worth while book for students, not only medical or dental, but in other disciplines needing a concise book on histopathology. I would also recommend it to junior histopathologists as an introductory text.

E A SHEFFIELD

Diagnosis and Management of Melanoma in Clinical Practice. Ed N Kirkham, D W K Cotton, R C Lallemand, J E White, R D Rosin. (Pp 190; DM 146.00.) Springer Verlag. 1992. ISBN 3-540-19717-6

The incidence of malignant melanoma is rising exponentially. It is a visible disease and therefore may be diagnosed early (even at an in situ stage) and cured by surgery. The contrast between this and the lack of effective treatment in advanced disease is stark.

This book is an informative and thought-provoking collection of articles from a multidisciplinary group of authors, many of whom are members of the Melanoma Study Group. This is an association of British specialists set up in the light of the success of the Scottish Melanoma Group. Many of the reviews are up to the minute. Certain chapters overlap, particularly those dealing with clinical aspects. The book is comprehensive, although a serious omission is any discussion regarding ocular melanoma. However, it fulfils its aim of "essential reading for anybody involved in the study or management of malignant melanoma".

Overall, the standard of the contributions is very high indeed. Particularly outstanding are those on histological diagnosis and of histopathological differential diagnosis. Those on familial melanoma, prognosis, surgery and isolated limb perfusion are also excellent. That on systemic treatment is thorough but makes depressing reading and serves to highlight how critical publicity and early diagnosis are. It is a pity, therefore, that the colour clinical photographs are indifferent; some of them have been published elsewhere, and show relatively advanced cases.

P A Riley writes encouragingly by presenting a stimulating chapter on prospects for new therapeutic targeting strategies for disseminated melanoma. Clinicians can all too often underestimate the psychological impact of the diseases they treat and the chapter by

BOOK REVIEWS

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The Health of the Nation. The BMJ View. Ed Richard Smith. (Pp 237; soft cover UK £9.95; Overseas £12.00.) British Medical Association. 1991. ISBN 0 7279 0314 4

Unfettered by having studied the United Kingdom government Green Paper that provoked this book, I was able to try, like a literary retrovirus, mentally to recreate the original based on the 28 critiques before me. The articles in question all originally appeared in the *British Medical Journal*.

Essentially it seems that the government is promulgating a hotch-potch of health care targets, called a strategy, and that the initiative gets no, one, or two cheers depending on your point of view. The Radical Statistics Health Group kicks off by giving the whole thing a bit of a thumbs down. It points out