

RISMED 00194

Book Review

Moore P, Minns T, Thomas L. *Risk Areas in Medical Practice*. Association for Victims of Medical Accidents, London, 1993, ISBN 0 9519 2780 9, price £48.00.

For six years, Britain's Association for Victims of Medical Accidents has been holding courses for lawyers, designed to provide them with some of the medical background needed to handle litigation in this area. The success of this initiative has prompted the association to produce the present "handbook for lawyers and doctors", based on notes taken at such a course and subsequently expanded by the lecturers and supplemented with other material.

There is no doubt at all that many lawyers entering this field can benefit from such material. In handling disciplinary cases or preparing for litigation, much time is often involved in teaching the attorneys involved some of the basic medical principles on which a case is likely to turn. A simple guide like the present one can simplify this process; indeed, an attorney with sufficient insight into the material may be better capable of determining at an early phase whether there is a *prima facie* case or not.

This book is very well suited to that purpose. The topics which it covers are selective but they relate to the situations which most commonly give rise to dispute, including spinal surgery, emergency procedures, the treatment of fractures and anaesthesia. On many of these topics the issues are extraordinarily well presented. Sections such as "risks of surgery to lumbar spine" indicate what can go wrong and why, while others such as "monitoring during anaesthesia" provide a lucid account of the physician's basic duties and thereby a yardstick to determine whether and where he may have failed to meet a recognized standard. Tables of criteria, e.g. for hospital admission after head injury, are similarly useful. Some sections are complemented by an admirable list of references so that the reader can go more deeply into an issue in which he is involved.

If one might criticize this admirable venture at all it is because it occasionally loses track of what it is trying to do. The subtitle "a handbook for lawyers and doctors" says as much; some of the tables and illustrations are not likely to be of much value to a lawyer (for example, the X-ray of a Colles fracture or the arthroscopic picture of a normal medial meniscus). On the other hand, the list of recommended prophylactic antibiotics and their dosage in various forms of surgery is not a sufficiently reliable and detailed guide for the doctor to follow. This is a pity. One could distil from parts of this book the essence of a companion volume written particularly for the physician and indicating how he can best avoid the common forms of medical accident. One might hope that in the future the AMVA

will take these two potential audiences — medical and legal — separately and produce a volume for each.

It is also possible that the closing section on “Nursing negligence” would benefit from being taken out and developed into a separate little book for the nurse and her advisers. As it is, it is composed largely of lists and citations including a lengthy excursion into the various theories of nursing which, as presented here, are much too theoretical to help the reader.

*William Bonnington
Vancouver, B.C., Canada*