

The Book Forum

Birth Defects

Is My Baby All Right? A Guide to Birth Defects; by Virginia Apgar and Joan Beck, 492 pp, with illus, \$9.95, Trident Press, 1973.

"Is my baby all right?" Medical personnel often must struggle for words to explain the nature and consequences of birth defects to stunned parents. In the emotional milieu of such a birth and in later treatment, everyone who deals with these children—physicians, nurses, social workers, therapists and parents—will profit from reading Dr. Apgar's book. In collaboration with a professional writer, she has produced a readable, informative book.

This is not the usual enumeration of syndromes and statistics. A warm interest in parent and child is evident in the insertion of pertinent case histories and a patient, logical explanation of even the intricacies of cell division. Complicated medical terminology is refreshingly absent. However, terms commonly used in describing abnormalities or which would be encountered by affected families are included.

Most parents would do well to read the applicable parts of this source book. Its orientation is toward explaining the nature of a birth defect and the evolution of a rational plan of treatment. The authors have carefully avoided endorsing specific therapies so that one can get an overview of treatment modes currently in favor and fads are not given undue prominence. Specific references to medical literature are not included, but general references where laymen can obtain helpful literature are found in almost every chapter. This is particularly important in dealing with conditions that lead to chronic handicaps.

The first chapters of the book deal with life before birth and what can go wrong and why. These discuss how life begins, the various stages of fetal development and the many genetic and environmental interactions that produce the newborn child. Later chapters illuminate specific abnormalities and the book ends with an excellent chapter on genetic counseling and an interesting discourse on how to prevent birth defects.

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Marihuana

Marihuana: Deceptive Weed, by Gabriel G. Nahas, 334 pp, 25 illus, \$12.50, Raven Press, 1972.

Of the spate of books about marihuana published recently, most have viewed cannabis as a rather benign drug. This conclusion is usually reached after a plethora of pharmacologic, sociologic, and historic data have been presented and interpreted, often with a hint or more of bias in marihuana's favor. Granted that a totally objective book on the subject is probably not possible, one might settle for a well-reasoned and documented volume slanted against marihuana. This Nahas has attempted to do but has failed—due, to his undisguised belief that marihuana is not only harmful but evil.

To support his essentially moralistic viewpoint, examples of biased selection and interpretation of studies and omissions of facts abound in every chapter. Although there is much accurate information in this book, especially in the areas of botany and chemistry, so much of the volume is distorted that one must know the marihuana literature in order to judge the accuracy of each statement. Accuracy, however, is not of prime importance to Nahas because for him marihuana is not only destructive, but evil and should, therefore, be eliminated, with little or no consideration of the cost to our basic social values. What he ultimately fails to face is the concept that to view cannabis as a curse rather than a problem is a tremendous step backward for medicine.

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Medical Care

How You Can Get Better Medical Care for Less Money, by Morris N. Placere and Charles S. Marwick, 192 pp, \$7.95, Walker & Co. (720 5th Ave, NY 10019), 1973.

This brief and easily read book presents a curious combination of condemnation and praise for the medical profession. On the one hand, physicians are described as almost diabolical in their intent to harm and impoverish patients; on the other hand, physicians are almost angelic in their ability to care for patients and to police themselves. It seems that the critical factors are specialty board certification, large university centers, and a monumental medical sophistication of patients.

The authors, by telling horror sto-

health care system. They point out some deficiencies of hospitals, nursing homes and physicians. By substituting "all" for "some" they develop an indictment that is awesome in its expanse. With this as an assumption, it is relatively simple to justify their proposal of two or three thousand physician inspectors "fully qualified" in their specialties, traveling about the country 50 weeks a year evaluating all physicians.

Perhaps the nom de plume of the senior author is the key to this book. There appears to be a deliberate attempt "to please" those who could degrade the physician and control the system. An alternate interpretation might be for the physician "to please" the people by reclaiming the special position of the doctor in the public's heart—or else. ...

It is well to know what is being said about the medical profession, but do not read this book if you are not prepared to be more objective than the authors.

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Hematology

Hematology: Principles and Practice, edited by Charles E. Mengel, Emil Frei, III, Ralph Nachman, 732 pp, with illus, \$20, Year Book Medical Publishers, 1972.

The rapid expansion of knowledge in the field of hematology has stimulated a proliferation of new textbooks. It is also indicative of the wealth of information available that all the new books, with one exception, are multiauthored. This allows the various contributors to speak with authority in their fields, but does demand a strong editorial policy. The present monograph is highly successful in this particular area and Drs. Mengel, Frei, and Nachman are to be congratulated.

The sections of this book are logically presented. Erythropoiesis, red blood cell maturation, and stem cell kinetics are followed by a description of iron metabolism. Subsequently, chapters concerning the aplastic and refractory anemias are presented. Next, the megaloblastic anemias are discussed and then this section is completed with a chapter devoted to transfusions and several chapters devoted to hemolysis.

I found the second section of this book to be the strongest. This is the portion devoted to white blood cells and their diseases. It begins with an excellent chapter concerned with leu-