'general practitioners'. The fear of these 'regular' practitioners was that their claims to professionalism were being undermined by 'irregular competitors' such as midwives. This early account of intra-professional rivalry will be of great interest to those who view doctors' fraternal spirit as a significant barrier to an increase in their public accountability (1). In the second aspect to his thesis, Keown is indicating a tendency for social problems to be medicalised by placing decision-making authority in the hands of doctors rather than say the courts. For Keown, this amounts to the 'medicalisation of deviance'.

By way of criticism, the book insufficiently examines an explanation of medicalisation mentioned briefly on p 165: the State's desire to avoid criminalising those who sought and provided abortion. This 'side-stepping' policy is shown by Keown to have a long pedigree, stemming from the days when common law courts used procedural technicalities to avoid prosecution for abortion, and indeed is found in many contemporary areas in the medico-legal field, such as neonaticide and mercy killing. While not conducive to certainty, such a policy permits both legal condemnation of these practices and flexibility in appropriate circumstances. Secondly, I would have found interesting an examination of the relation between the decisions of the early courts (common law and ecclesiastical) and biblical injunctions. Like much discussion of abortion, the book assumes such a relation is straightforward (2). Lastly, it is regrettable that the book could not have examined the motives for significant post-1982 legislative proposals in an era where change to abortion law seems unavoidable. These however are trivial criticisms and cannot detract from a work which hopefully will act as a catalyst for similar socio-historical inquiries in medical law.

References

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Ethics and Regulation of Clinical Research

This 'survey of the ethical and legal duties of clinical researchers' is firmly embedded in the framework of American reports and regulations. Levine is a professor of medicine at Yale and his book bears the stamp of the practising clinician and the experienced investigator rather than the moral philosopher. He wants to provide workable solutions to practical problems. Philosophical questions about underlying ethical principles are not relentlessly pursued to the point of analytical or speculative exhaustion. Indeed, Levine accepts that most of the answers have been provided by the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioural Research. Arguments about the justification of clinical research with human subjects are referred to rather than discussed (the book has an ample 724 references for the more enquiring and disputatious reader). In short, this is a kind of handbook showing how principles, regulations and guidelines are and should be applied in practice. The fact that the regulations are exclusively American should not deter British readers. The limensness of the regulatory framework in this country is sufficient to ensure that they will find it extremely useful. As with any reference work it should be judged not by the way the arguments are developed (these are few and far between) but by the extent of its coverage and the lucidity of its organisation. In both respects it is an excellent work. Levine has set himself a specific task and has carried it out admirably. Critical comments on the book are therefore likely to read either as quibbles or as recommendations for an expanded third edition. Mine fall into the latter category and arise only from a sense of disappointment that some issues or questions were not explored further. Those on the edge of scientific literacy would benefit from a fuller discussion of good and bad research design, and the relationship between the scientific and ethical evaluation of research. Anyone looking for guidance on one of the 'hot topics' in clinical research - when to end controlled trials - will also find this book disappointing. Levine gives short shrift to the idea that the views of anyone other than the scientific community are relevant to such questions. They and they alone should decide what levels of probability should be attached to the determination of risk and efficacy. The rules of evidence are, in his view, determined solely by the requirements of good science.

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New Prospects for Medicine
Edited by Jonathan M Austyn, 131 pages, New York, £12.50, Oxford University Press, 1987

If you are the sort of person who enjoys succinct well-written essays on topical medical matters, then you will undoubtedly enjoy this slim collection. Let me say at the outset, please do not be put off by the title or the cover.

The Wolfson College lectures have been a regular event at the University of Oxford since 1970. These essays record some of those delivered in 1987.

The work is introduced by an expert transplant immunologist. To a medical latecomer like myself it is astounding that it was only in the 1970s that it became evident that one might actually be able to isolate genes from any organism, let alone man. Further, it is equally hard to believe that as late as the 1950s, lymphocytes had no known purpose!

In one essay, which is my personal favourite, Sir Raymond Hoffenberg, President of the Royal College of Physicians discusses the problems and prospects for modern medicine. I do not suppose many people realise that a 50 per cent reduction in the four major high cost techniques - CT scans, renal dialysis, fetal monitoring and coronary artery bypass grafts would save less than 1 per cent of the annual costs of healthcare.

Further essays, all by leading academics and clinicians, cover topics as varied and as fascinating as modern approaches to cancer, the future of transplantation and the new genetics; there is even a brave discussion of where the next breakthroughs are likely to be. One interesting point, which again I think few people are aware of, is that the estimate of cancer deaths (USA) from diet is higher than those from smoking.

For the final few words, I would like