

thought to be a danger to their children lost these rights. There was almost universal idealisation of the medical competence and technical authority of the staff. The doctors strove to be polite to the parents, to avoid aggression, ignore inconsistencies, to avoid condemnation whatever their suspicions. The mother's competence was not seen to lie in knowledge, but in seeking and deferring to expert advice. It was the doctor who controlled the agenda. An alliance was created between staff and parents in the interests of the children, which like maternal care and medical competence was also idealised. This alliance, however, was based on an assumption of medical expertise and parental ignorance, and was characterised by some lack of frankness on the medical side. Modifications occurred where parents had special knowledge, but where these changes were within the bureaucratic format, they did not override it. While parents were accorded joint expertise in the alliance, they were at the same time devalued and had problems in knowing how to express their anxieties about their children, to find a place for them in the agenda of the consultation. Problems discussed were confined to those of medical interest; thus problems encountered in the development of normal children were not on the agenda. The medical control of the encounter was reinforced by the patient's file, which constituted an alternative and medically warranted account to the parents' account, and by the presence of a medically subordinate audience. Teaching, however, made fundamental changes in the nature of the consultation and Strong proposes that this is sufficiently serious for thought to be given to organising teaching differently.

Drawing on evidence from other studies, Strong concludes that the bureaucratic format is widely used, although there are inevitable modifications where patients are adults rather than children since the latter are not held responsible for their actions as adults are. Strong confirms medical dominance, but points to the balance of medical gentility.

At a time when proposals to introduce an insurance-base to the national health service are being mooted, the comparison of observations in the US and the UK is particularly valuable. The US

system, essentially in the market place, leads to a different doctor-patient relationship in which patients 'shop around' and doctors not only spend more time giving information to and also flattering patients, but 'sell themselves' including by adverse comment on other physicians; something which is 'not done' in the bureaucratic format. The lack of medical competition is closely associated with the NHS mode. In the tax-based system consultations were more hurried, impersonal and uninformative with less choice accorded to the patients, and their rights in these matters not clearly presented to them. But 'the Health Service, for all its defects, is a major triumph for the patient too (who) can get a standard of care that before was only available to the wealthy, and, at the same time, can retain many of those same rights to polite treatment, privacy and choice that were previously only guaranteed to private practice. And things might not have been so. Patient power is the only sure road to medical gentility' (p 220). Although Strong makes excessively simple comments about the political control of doctors in the NHS, nevertheless, his argument that bourgeois medicine has triumphed, is well made.

Strong's book should be read by sociologists and by medical practitioners and administrators. Sociologists, in addition to the substantive data, will find the concluding discussion of Johnson, Parsons, Navarro and Freidson interesting. The discussion of policy implication is brief, but thought-provoking. Although Strong underestimates the sacred component in consultation which only in limited circumstances is like shopping or other daily errands, his analysis is particularly valuable in helping us to understand how the upshot of consultations is determined by the general political, social and economic shape of society, by the organisation of medical knowledge and of the medical profession and by the maintenance and encouragement of dependency in the parents.

MARGARET STACEY

The Social Challenge of Ageing,

Edited by David Hobman, Croom Helm, 1980, pp 286, £8.95.

The book edited by the indefatigable Director of Age Concern (England)

is like many of its class, good and bad. With contributions from 18 individuals it can hardly fail to be so.

The chapter by Havighurst on 'Ageing in Western Society' is a well written account of the demographic and social changes which have affected the elderly as individuals and as a group in recent decades. More interesting, however, is the chapter from Japan on 'Eastern Society' which gives us a glimpse of the very different customs and problems there. One Western gerontologist on being told that three out of four old people live with their children in Japan was inspired to ask 'Why do you have to study our social services then?' A good point which is mainly answered by the great speed of change in the proportion and disposition of the elderly in Japan.

The chapter on 'Ageing and the Environment' is much less satisfactory and is in my opinion far too specialised and full of jargon for the type of reader likely to dip into this book. I doubt whether more than a very few readers would manage to stagger through to the end of this contribution!

The chapter on 'Education' is, however, useful and interesting and gave me a number of new thoughts on this field including the rather odd notion from Kosberg that by discussing successful ageing with students we may put them off and instead we should be concentrating all the time upon problems and more problems! To my way of thinking the reverse is likely to be true.

There is a chapter on Health from Professor Brocklehurst which gets off to a flying start but ends rather lamely with somewhat scrappy notes under the usual headings - have we not all been guilty of this tailing off phenomenon?

It is also a little difficult to understand why the 'sense organs, particularly the eyes', should be discussed under the heading of 'The Joints'.

Tony Whitehead has produced a well written account of 'The Ageing Mind' which will be eminently readable to a wide range of readers and a similarly competent discussion deals with spiritual aspects.

In general I feel that it is a moderately useful book for the generally interested enquirer. Some serious imbalance in amount of specialist data and too frequent irritating spelling errors.

J WILLIAMS