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## BOOK REVIEWS

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**“The Scalpel and the Kukri: A Surgeon & his family’s adventures among the Gurkhas”** by Peter Pitt ISBN 0-95-520590-5 Publishers: John Murray, London £15.00 pp 248

Peter Pitt recounts his experiences as the surgeon in BMH Dharan, Nepal in the 1960s. This is an enjoyable read, in an easy, conversational style, in which surgical and medical anecdotes are interspersed with a diary of Peter’s life in 1960s Nepal. Although much of the medicine seems dated now, the picture Peter paints of a small British outpost is one which current RAMC officers are unfortunately unlikely ever to see. As such, the relevance of this book to the modern RAMC officer is questionable, but the light prose style still makes this a thoroughly enjoyable and worthwhile read.

Lt Col DP Edwards  
Consultant Surgeon

**“The Oath: A surgeon under fire”** by Khassan Baiev ISBN 0-74320-2011-0 Publishers: Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, London £17.99 pp 354

Khassan Baiev, in relating his experiences of the Chechen wars, gives us a completely different picture of a military surgeon. Born in 1963, Baiev trained in Russia as a maxillofacial reconstructive surgeon, and enjoyed a lucrative practise in Moscow. At the outbreak of war he returned home to Chechnya where he treated war wounded of both armies, with increasingly dwindling resources. At risk from the Russian bombardment and threatened by the Chechen resistance for treating Russian soldiers in accordance with the Hippocratic oath (of the title), he gives a harrowing report of the country’s decline towards anarchy.

This is a very powerful book, and although the style is not as easy as Peter Pitt’s, it is no less enjoyable. This compelling read is a must for all military surgeons, as it includes not only the injuries seen on the modern battlefield, but shows how one determined and very skilful surgeon coped with multiple casualties with limited resources, at the expense of his own physical and mental health. Khassan Baiev received awards from Human Rights Watch for his work, is acclaimed at home and abroad, and truly is the modern Dominique Larrey.

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**The Contact A Family Directory.** Edited by Dean Caswell. Published by Contact a family 2006 edition. £35. PB. Pp 1-950. ISBN No. 1-874715-64-.5

This directory and its parent organization are a registered charity, founded in 1979, for families with disabled children. It aims to provide expert and comprehensive knowledge about rare disorders and all aspects of disability, including a wealth of personal experiences and contacts. It is written from a parents’ perspective. Each entry contains a short medical description of the condition together with details of inheritance patterns and prenatal diagnosis. This information is followed by details of the related support networks: their activities, publications, and what they can offer to families. The entries are concise and very informative for a health professional who may not be a subject matter expert.

This resource is available in a paperback book format, CD-ROM and as a website available at [www.cafamily.org.uk](http://www.cafamily.org.uk). This directory would be most helpful to a health professional who has to discuss the diagnosis of a specific or rare disorder affecting a child with their parents. This would be very relevant to the child who is likely to develop acute or lifelong health problems.

The directory is organized by specific conditions into alphabetical order. There is a clear index of all the conditions covered by the directory. The clinical information available in this volume is excellent but limited in scope. All the medical entries appearing in the directory have been written by, or approved by, the leading medical experts on the disorder. This information includes details of the authorship and the date of each entry. The most useful part of this directory would appear to be the links to quality assured websites and to UK based support groups. Unfortunately this information was not available in the paperback directory I was asked to review. This information was apparently available on the CD-ROM version of the directory costing £88.13p. This information is however readily available from the website address listed above or by telephoning the help line on 0808 808 3555. The Contact a family website is available free. There is however a restriction on access. Only six conditions can be viewed in any 30-day period before a subscription is due.

The breadth of knowledge and the effort that has gone into compiling the contact a family directory is enormous. Unfortunately I cannot recommend this paperback directory in its present format. If I wanted to use this resource in the future I would access the

Internet version. Unless you work in a tertiary paediatric unit I doubt you would access the site often enough to justify the cost of a regular subscription. This resource is primarily aimed at the Parents of children with specific conditions or rare disorders. This is a useful resource nonetheless and knowledge of the Contact a family directory organisation and its associated website will help me to support parents more effectively in the future.

Lt Col G Wyn Griffiths RAMC. General Practitioner and GP trainer.

**Behavior and Medicine** 4th Edition. Wedding D and Stuber M 2006. pp XVI + 389. Hogrefe & Huber £24.95 ISBN: 0-88937-305-1

This well-organised edition of what is now a standard teaching text in North America has a structure reminiscent of the Carl Jung's posthumously published "Man and his Symbols" (Aldus Jupiter 1964) which was aimed at the general reader. Sections such as Mind-Body Interactions in Health and Disease, Physician-Patient Interactions and Social and Cultural Issues in Health Care have their individual chapters illustrated with classical pictures (e.g. Durer's *Melencolia* on page 142) and epigrams and poetry whose authors range from Epicurus to Albert Schweitzer.

UK-based readers may be pleasantly surprised by the catholicity of sources acknowledged by the US-based contributors – Winnicott of Great Britain takes his place alongside continental-based psychodynamic theorists such as Freud, Jung, Adler and Erikson (the latter of "identity crisis" fame) on page 134 as does Professor DR Laurence late of the Pharmacology Department of

University College Hospital Medical School London. But how does the book stand up as a didactic work? Quite well in the opinion of this reviewer. Americanisms apart (and even these have teaching value for any Army doctor liable for NATO duties – which means most of us) this text covers the gamut of behaviour science involved in medical practice without in any way usurping the place of an introductory textbook of psychiatry.

Overall the book represents fairly good value for its price and size. No topic is introduced at a level of complexity which would require a second reading.

Nevertheless plenty of direction is given in the "Suggested Readings" sections which conclude each of the 26 chapters to the reader who wishes to explore the literature further. The final chapter headed "American Medicine is Sick" is an excellent and very short account of how an essentially unplanned healthcare system can deliver virtually any diagnostic or therapeutic modality to those who can afford to pay, yet earlier (page 258) the American Medical Association's Council on Ethical and Judicial Affairs considers that the patient's failure to pay a bill is itself not sufficient justification for terminating a therapeutic relationship. A text for the DMSD library service definitely, but for the GP's or specialist's office only if the occupant is especially interested in the book's subject matter – perhaps if engaged in research with a behaviour science aspect. Edinburgh graduates will doubtless approve of the book's references to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and to the medical bildungsroman author (on page 358) Colin Douglas.

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