In a brief and humane foreword to this description of the diagnosis and procedure for claiming industrial injuries benefits the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Social Security expresses the hope that chest physicians and general practitioners will find it useful, which is likely to be so. It gives a brief description of occupational lung diseases prescribed under the Industrial Injuries Acts and, bearing in mind that controversial issues cannot be discussed in a pamphlet of this type, it is accurate and clear.

The booklet is in three parts: the first deals with diagnosis; the second describes the work of the Pneumoconiosis Medical Panels; and the third gives general information about benefits. In Appendices are given prescribed occupations in detail, and addresses of Pneumoconiosis Medical Panels.

In reading a Government publication on occupational lung disease it is necessary to remember that it is the legal definition which counts in this context. That the definition of pneumoconiosis is entirely in terms of pathology should perhaps have been emphasized as it may not be obvious to some readers, but in the same paragraph in which the definition is quoted, diagnosis is referred to as depending on a radiograph, clinical examination, and the work history. It is unfortunate also that in the description of radiological appearances the term 'reticulation' is referred to, only to be followed by the statement that it has been superseded, the one previous reference to it being in the legal definition of pneumoconiosis where it has a purely pathological and not a radiological meaning.

The question of the co-existence of chronic bronchitis with pneumoconiosis of any type or stage could also have been elaborated in view of the difficulty which is felt by many people in cases where the disability from bronchitis is much greater than that from pneumoconiosis.

Symptomless pleural calcification as the sole evidence of previous exposure to asbestos is not mentioned. The dictum that asbestos bodies in the sputum represent only exposure to the dust but not asbestos is stated, although later on asbestos bodies are given as a diagnostic pointer in mesothelioma where there may be no overt pulmonary fibrosis. It would seem safer now to regard asbestos bodies in the sputum as evidence of some lung damage, and probably potentially serious.

In the section on byssinosis the disease is described as occurring in workers employed in cotton rooms, blowing rooms or card rooms. There is now evidence that winders in the cotton industry are also at risk.

The description of the work of the Pneumoconiosis Medical Panels is concise and helpful.

R. I. McCallum


Dr. Acheson's book is the result of years of careful work. It sets out in great detail the reasons why it is necessary to link together medical data from many sources. Written from the viewpoint of a doctor, it has, however, wider implication concerning both central and local authorities. Dr. Acheson points out the cost of the present inefficient system and the cost of a computer system. This appears to be sensibly costed.

The book illustrates that, although much of the information gained by the study is of a medical nature, other subjects, such as housing and town planning, would also benefit greatly.

It was refreshing to see that the numerous examples of the various studies were drawn from many of the advanced western nations and not only from England, showing that the problems are international as well as national.

As a result of the growing importance of the subject of record linkage, Dr. Acheson's book should be read by all who are concerned with medical data related to birth, death, marriage, and ill-health.

The medical record has implication for a whole spectrum of researchers in many aspects of medical science. Reading this small volume should give them a new concept of the information they are handling.

An extremely important point made very well is the need to appreciate that the computer problems in this subject are trivial when compared with the collection, transcription, and input problems that amassing such data generates.

The perennial problem of the confidential nature of medical records is properly treated in the chapter on 'The Public Issues'.

The author is to be congratulated for producing such a readable and informative text in so few pages. It is sad to see that his work has not yet been taken up at a national level.

D. E. Clark

BOOKS RECEIVED

(Review in a later issue is not precluded by notice here of books recently received.)


Medical Record Linkage

D. E. Clark

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