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## BOOK REVIEW

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Book review editor: R L Maynard

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**Fitness For Work: The Medical Aspects. 2nd edition.** Edited by COX RAF, EDWARDS FC, MCCALLUM RI. (Pp 518; price £60 (hardback.) 1995. Oxford: Oxford Medical Publications. ISBN 0-19-2623443 (Hbk) 0-19-2623451 (Pbk).

This is the second edition of a publication by the Faculty of Occupational Medicine of the Royal College of Physicians, first published in 1988, and launched at a Faculty conference in London in February this year. The Department of Social Security and Health and Safety Executive contributed to production costs. It is likely that most United Kingdom readers of this journal will be at least aware of its existence, if not actually own a copy.

There are relatively few jobs with clearly defined criteria for fitness. Experience has shown that judgements on employability vary widely among different practitioners, suggesting the need for better consistency in opinion. Restrictions on employability may be imposed unnecessarily and the individual denied opportunity to engage in their chosen job or progress in a career, with consequent frustration and socioeconomic disadvantage. Conversely, health risks from a particular type of job might be underestimated, or possibly not recognised at all, with potentially harmful consequences for the individual employee or others in the workplace. There is a clear need, therefore, for greater awareness of this subject—as well as a practical source of advice and reference on fitness issues for medical and nursing practitioners, managers, and others concerned with health in the workplace.

This particular book comes highly commended. It is highly readable at a lengthy sitting and also provides a helpful reference source to dip into as needed. It is crammed with information and advice based on the considerable experience of the many contributing authors. Much of the material is difficult to find in other publications. Each

chapter is written as a joint item by an occupational physician and a practising clinician in the particular specialty or field of practice discussed. It deals with general principles underlying medical assessments for work, the interface between medicine and the workplace, legal aspects, ethical issues, and current services and provisions for those with disabilities. Significant new additions and updates add value to the first edition, including descriptions of spinal disorders, trauma, fitness for work overseas, ill health retirement, European Union legislation, and ethics. The text describes situations as diverse as a prospective diver with a healed, scarred tympanic membrane to the applicant for a public service vehicle licence who has a colour vision impairment (both of whom are likely to be fit for their chosen vocations).

The book reaffirms the continuing prejudice which is still shown in attitudes to the employment of people with health problems and disabilities. This may occur for a number of complex reasons, though in a practical sense it can reflect fear of poor sickness absence record, and the inconvenience and business costs which follow—a fear that is generally unfounded. The effect is to reduce the likelihood of employees disclosing conditions which might be better known to the employer—for example, for safety reasons if modification is needed to the job or environment.

Appropriate emphasis is given in the book to multidisciplinary cooperation as a requirement for the effective management of fitness issues in employment. There is mention too of the ever changing nature of the work environment, the introduction of new technologies and working practices, emergent risks to health, and other changes which may have beneficial as well as negative influences on employment prospects for those with health impairments.

Doctors in training for associate of the Faculty of Occupational Medicine, as well as more experienced specialists, will find much that is useful in this book. It will serve well the needs of practitioners in occupational health and primary health care; thereby, the beneficiaries will be the disabled themselves.

FRASER M KENNEDY

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## NOTICES

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**2nd International Health and Ecology Conference. 25-28 September 1996. University of Wollongong, New South Wales, Australia.**

The host of this important event is *Nursing the Environment*; the Australian Nursing Federation National Special Interest Group.

The conference theme will explore the issues of community and work based initiatives, policy development, emergency ecological and theoretical perspectives for a healthy world and alternative models of health care. Three international keynote speakers have already accepted direct invitations to present. They are:

- Dr Iona Kickbush—World Health Organisation, Switzerland
- Dr Eleanore Schuster—College of Nursing, Florida
- Professor A J McMichael—University of London

The target audience includes health care professionals, members of governments, businesses, industry, educational institutions and the community at large. We anticipate an attendance in excess of 400 delegates.

For further information contact: The Meeting Planners, 108 Church Street, Hawthorn, Victoria, Australia 3122. Phone (61 3) 9819 3700. Facsimile: (61 3) 9819 5978.

**Industrial Audiometry Courses. 20-22 March and 17-19 April 1996. Manchester.**

These two identical three day courses offer training in audiometry for industrial medical staff, safety officers, and others concerned with hearing conservation in industry. The courses, which comply with the syllabus recommended by the British Society of Audiology have the approval of the Society. The courses will be held at the Wendover Hotel, Eccles, Manchester.

Full details are available from Dr W Tempest, "Kismet", Croyde Rd, St Annes, Lancs FY8 1EX. Tel (01253) 712550.

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## CORRECTION

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Kilburn KH, Thornton JC. **Prediction equations for balance measured as sway speed by head tracking with eyes open and closed** (1995;52:544-6). The sway speed equation with eyes closed, in the abstract and results section, should be:

$$\text{Ln}(\text{closed}) = -0.585707 - 0.023074 \times \text{age} + 0.000315 \times \text{age}^2 + 0.005967 \times \text{height (cm)}$$