

decision. In the North American context, the Canadian example of the consequences of financial stringency are bed reductions and shortages of medical personnel and therefore longer waiting periods for elective surgery. However, to date hospital closure is a rare event and one that is considered to be an unacceptable solution.

One of the significant problems for rural dwellers, and one that residents of large urban centres seldom think about, is the emergency ambulance services. Rutledge, Ricketts and Bell in chap. 11, 'Emergency Services in Rural America' point out that it is not only ambulance services but in more remote areas the problem includes areas without phones, problems with the reliance of UHF and VHF signals, and the use of helicopters. As pointed out in both Meade's and in Joseph's chapters, the authors note the great variation of conditions that exist in a rural health care setting. Based on North Carolina data the authors question whether the higher mortality rates in the eastern part vs the western part of the state is a function of variations in emergency medical services.

The concluding chapter by Gregory Nycz and John Schmelzer, researchers at the Marshfield Clinic in Wisconsin, examines 'Geographic Variations and Health Expenditures'. Their forecast for the remainder of the 1990's, and their examination of aspects of the Medicare component of the U.S. total health budget leads to the question of alternative methods of financing for the ever-increasing amounts needed. But the pressing problem is not only for rural systems, which the authors discuss, but for the United States health system as a whole as it is for governments everywhere. How this common problem is being and will be addressed, in different countries and jurisdictions within these countries, attests to the inherent geographical nature of medical care systems.

Overall, Gesler and Ricketts edited volume, *Health in*

*Rural North America: The Geography of Health Care Services and Delivery* reflects the progress that has been made in the field. It provides a new and useful book to meet a need in the literature. Its single best feature is that the editors and the authors, in the main, have made a real effort to focus on geographical aspects of the rural medical care system. Given that many of the authors are not geographers this is a particular achievement. A clear statement of a medical geographical perspective has to be the goal in the writings of all medical geographers. There is still a strong tendency in the field to consider this secondary or to believe that somehow it is self-evident.

Finally, it is worth noting that health care in developing countries has received much greater attention by both North American and European medical geographers than have studies of the rural medical care system in their own countries. The organization and content of the book, plus the fact that it is available in a paper edition, makes it a good choice as a text to cover the rural portion of medical geography course. Of course, as with almost all edited works, some readers will have wished for the inclusion of other themes. For example, the title indicates that it will cover rural health in North America, but one does not get an overview of the Canadian rural health system. Instead all three Canadian contributions address the very focused high-risk groups, and so the general patterns and trends are not discussed. However, Gesler and Ricketts in their well conceived and edited book have established a base from which others can progress.

Atkinson College, York University  
North York  
Ontario M3J 1P3  
Canada

FRANK A. BARRETT

**Personality and Disease**, edited by HOWARD S. FRIEDMAN.  
Wiley Interscience, New York, 1990. 315 pp.

It is commonly believed that there are individual differences in susceptibility to disease and how illness is handled and that these disparities appear to be related, at least in part, to the nature of the person. So one is inclined to agree with Howard Friedman's opening statement in his concluding chapter, "There should be little doubt that personality, stress and health are interrelated." The trouble is that in the book, *Personality and Disease*, personality is the variable employed to stand for 'kinds of people', everything from catecholamine levels to cancer replace the variable disease and health is rarely mentioned (with the refreshing exception of Aaron Antonovsky's excellent chapter). The result is a book about a subject of widespread interest and importance, written by contributors who are acknowledged leaders in their specialties that should be read by anyone wishing to pursue the issues in depth. Reading it, however, continually reinforces the belief that this is a weak field, marked by fuzzy definitions and poor science. The difficulties seem to stem from nothing less than imprecision and variations in the meanings of the words personality, disease, health and that protean thing stress.

The contributors themselves make these points in many of the chapters of the book. In her interesting chapter, Suzanne C. Quelette Kobasa reports on a mock conference as if Gordon Allport, a founding personality psychologist, were present and commenting on current research. She repeats his definition of personality, "the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his characteristic behavior and thought." And then puts into his mouth the accusation that current health research is limited to one personality aspect per study

or per investigator without "the integrative studies that would look at the relevance to health and illness of the patterns of relationships between such things as motives, emotions, cognitive styles, temperament, learned expectancies and sociocultural orientation." (Italics in the original.) Well, he (and she) couldn't be more correct, so why isn't anybody listening. These failures in representing personality can be found throughout the chapters. For example, Type A behavior and its apparent correlation with expressed coronary heart disease is frequently mentioned. But then it is pointed out that Type A is better represented by the trait of hostility. Well, what is the personality, Type A behavior, hostility trait, or maybe it is an inadequate personality, masked by hostility and represented in Type A behavior. You might as well guess. These investigators don't seem to see that the generalizability of their findings is impeached by the methodological reductiveness that simplifies the complexity of human personality to a single behavior or trait.

In a nice chapter by Tracey Revenson, we get a glimpse of how an ecological perspective might, "untangle some of this confusion and suggest new directions for personality-disease research." Revenson criticizes the too common "linear, unidirectional mechanistic models," and suggests much more attention to the context of behavior and the contribution that context makes to the process of personality and its relationship to disease. The author points out the situational, sociocultural, interpersonal and temporal contexts and how they influence the relationship of personality and disease. So, the reader asks, where is it done the way she suggests? Not in some *hors d'oeuvres* approach, but as standard fare. Once again, the answer is disappointing. A. N. Whitehead once said that the secret of clear thinking is to stay on the subject. In a paragraph by one of the best known investigators in this field, it is difficult to tell whether

the subject is personality, coping, emotion, stress, illness or all of them. The title of the book is *Personality and Disease*, but many of the measures of disease that are employed are inconstant, variably related to disease processes and subject to large problems in accuracy and precision. I may seem harsh, but I am echoing criticisms voiced repeatedly by the contributors. Lydia Tomoshok has a good chapter attempting to articulate the biopsychological model, particularly as applied to oncology. The statement is a sound one and her suggestions for further work are interesting, but the problems are more apparent than the successes.

Then there is that word stress. One does not know whether to praise Hans Selye or to forget him (I tend to the latter). When my mother and father died, that was stress. When I got married, that was stress. The birth of my children was stress. Money troubles, legal difficulties and the burdens of work are stress. The birth of difficult new ideas is stress. All my patients talk about is stress. They don't work hard, they are stressed. They are not burdened, toiling, worried, concerned, sad, triumphant, defeated, bereaved,

rejected, ecstatic, striving, struggling or elated, they are stressed. Maybe you think that what happens to rats when they are dropped into freezing water can be rehabilitated as a reliable research variable between personality and disease, but this book raises real doubts.

The book makes a convincing case for tossing out most of the findings in the field and returning, as they say, to the drawing board. The questions to be answered before another study is initiated are what is personality and how is it to be related to disease? Is disease the proper measure of the effect of personality on health, and if not, what is? One cannot entirely reprove these investigators for the faults revealed here. The error seems to be continuing to adhere to the classic dicta of 20th Century science in an arena where they do not work. Maybe this book simply makes clear that, like the Irish elk of evolution fame, in studies of whole persons and illness, reductive science never gets out of the woods.

28 Old Fulton Street  
Brooklyn, New York 11201, U.S.A.

ERIC J. CASSELL

**Herbal and Magical Medicine—Traditional Healing Today**, edited by J. KIRKLAND, H. F. MATHEWS, C. W. SULLIVAN and K. BALDWIN. Duke University Press, Durham. 1992. 240 pp., £42.75 (hardback); £15.95 (paperback).

This is an interesting but certainly not the ultimate book on cross-cultural medicine. The book contains 11 chapters, including the introduction. It draws as the cover says, on perspectives from folklore, anthropology, psychology, medicine and botany. The studies concentrate on traditional medical beliefs and practices among Native, Anglo- and African Americans in eastern North Carolina and Virginia.

The first chapter is about folk medicine in contemporary America; it considers folk medicine as a complex and culturally integrated system with its own rationality. Chapter 2 discusses healing today and acknowledges that we live in a medically pluralistic society. It stresses the social functions of folk healing in integrating individuals into society. Chapter 3 describes the 'technique' of talking fire out of burns. It suggests that successful healers operate by magical gestures and charms, highly empathizing with their patients. The reported successes all stem from interviews, however, not from direct personal observation. Robert Sammons, in Chap. 4, tries to explain these same phenomena from the perspective of hypnosis. He argues that hypnosis could, as an explanatory schema, provide a bridge between folk and modern medicine.

Chapter 6 discusses the problem of patients alternating between folk and 'scientific' medicine(s). The author illustrates that folk medicine covers a much broader segment of human life and of societies functioning than modern medicine. One of his explanations is that a hierarchy exists in illness-types, the most serious ones often being ascribed to causes in the spiritual realms. These take on meaning only "when one knows the theory operating behind the folk belief ...".

In 'Rootwork from the Clinician's Perspective' it is recognized that a large part of health care takes place outside the perspective of the officially trained medical doctor. And that a bio-medical model, notwithstanding its presumed scientific basis, often fails to provide the patient with an acceptable explanation for his illness. The problem of finding a common language or cultural perspective is mentioned. It is not clear with what purpose the individual cases are being described. The same holds for the following

chapter about the cultural epidemiology of 'spiritual heart trouble'. The condition is identified as a psychosomatic illness in which conflicting obligations play a central role. This chapter seems the only recognizable attempt at bringing the reports on folk medicine upon a higher theoretical level.

Chapter 8 (Herbal medicine among the Lumbee Indians) describes herbal medicines and the ways they are being prepared and applied, in order to provide a comparison with the findings of modern research in pharmacology etc. This implies that the herbs are isolated from their cultural context and interpreted from a western point of view.

Chapter 9 is on childbirth education and traditional beliefs. Though the author makes some interesting statements about folk practices the chapter rests upon a rather biased sample (white middle class women) and seems to have started from a prejudgment in terms of untrue, unproven and sometimes even dangerous aspects of folk beliefs about pregnancy and delivery.

The final chapter treats the "Aesthetic Agency in the folk medical practices and remembrances of North Carolinians". The author explains (p. 185): "... when they (metaphors) are reported merely as texts, dislodged from their enabling, appropriate contexts, they easily can be viewed as faintly comic curiosities or exemplary dangers of ignorance". And p. 194: "The aesthetic complex of symbolic, culturally expressive, structured, and patterned entities (statements, narratives, and enactments) emanating from authoritative sources and operating within intimately significant environments gives greater dimension to our understanding of the existence as well as the efficacy of contemporary folk medical practices and remembrance".

The book concludes with an impressive bibliography of about 30 pages.

In concluding: the book certainly contains some interesting chapters. But the selection of articles seems rather unbalanced, a serious attempt at integrating the different contributions on a higher theoretical level is lacking, and the attitude of some of the authors toward folk medical practices seems rather biased by their unquestioned belief in the rationality and culture-free scientific basis of western medicine.

The Netherlands

C. W. AAKSTER