Review
Reviewed Work(s): Mortgaging The Earth by Bruce Rich
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Critical Condition: Human Health and the Environment

Ed Eric Chivian, Michael McCally, Howard Hu, Andrew Haines
MIT Press, £14.25, pp 240
ISBN 0-262-53118-6

There is a real danger that concern for the environment will turn to apathy. **Critical Condition**, a report by Physicians for Social Responsibility, is therefore to be welcomed because it takes a fresh approach—examining the impact of environmental change on human health. Physicians for Social Responsibility shared the 1985 Nobel peace prize with International Physicians for Prevention of Nuclear War, for educating the public about the medical consequences of nuclear war. It is appropriate that they should now address themselves to the global environmental crisis.

Quantifying the impact of environmental changes on human health is difficult because of inadequate data and uncertainties associated with models of climatic change. None the less, the signs are ominous. Global warming is likely to cause an expansion or shift in vectors of infectious diseases, such as malaria and yellow fever, to higher latitudes and altitudes. If depletion of the ozone layer continues to the year 2075 an additional 154 million cases of skin cancer and a 50% increase in cataracts are expected. Ground level ozone, from cars, industrial facilities, and increased penetration of ultraviolet B radiation reduced crop yields by 5-10% in the United States in the 1980s. Given exponential population growth, a reduced ability to produce food becomes critical.

The report presents strong arguments for maintaining biodiversity to prevent the loss of medical models. The observation that sponges don't get cancer led to the identification of cytarabine—used to induce remission of acute myeloid leukaemia. Bears hibernate for five months each year—during which time they lay down new bone and metabolise urea. Understanding the physiology better might lead to treatments for osteoporosis and renal failure. Untold opportunities will be lost if, as expected, a quarter of all species become extinct in the next 50 years.

While many of the report's arguments are persuasive, some sections are less convincing. The statement that increased ultraviolet B radiation will seriously impair the immune system seems speculative and should be backed by better references. Similarly, the assertion that atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons will lead to 2-4 million deaths from cancer requires more than one reference.

The authors' stated aim is to motivate both physicians and general readers to make changes in their lifestyle. It is difficult to address both types of reader in one report, and the medical terminology may deter general readers. In addition, the report lacks positive messages and possible solutions, which are essential if people are to be motivated to change. It is therefore unlikely to appeal to those who do not have a special interest. This is sad because the environment is a fundamental determinant of human health, and doctors should be seen to be concerned.—**MICK BRADICK, CONSULTANT IN PUBLIC HEALTH MEDICINE, HIGHLAND HEALTH BOARD, INVERNESS**

Mortgaging the Earth

Bruce Rich
Earthscan, £14.95, pp 376
ISBN 1-85383-221-8

This summer marks the 50th anniversary of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, two of the century's quintessential institutions, founded at Bretton Woods in New Hampshire in 1944 in the wake of economic collapse during the second world war. Their aim was to encourage global economic growth, smooth out financial fluctuations, and finance international relief. Bruch Rich of the US Environmental Defense Fund finds no cause for celebration. In **Mortgaging the Earth** he harshly criticises the social and environmental effects of many of the World Bank's projects and views this agency as a "prime accomplice in a quiet war against the diversity of human cultures and our planet's biological inheritance."

The founders of the bank saw it feeding off limitless natural resources to bring ever increasing economic prosperity to all corners of the globe. Instead, obsessed with grandiose projects, pressurised into turning money around quickly whatever the consequences, centralised, bureaucratic, and highly secretive, the bank has been responsible for environmental destruction on a vast scale, catalysing widespread deforestation in the name of "economic progress." Whether building a polluting coal fired power plant in India, burning rainforest in Brazil, or moving populations in Indonesia, the bank has to answer for the involuntary uprooting of tens upon tens of millions of people—the poor, the illiterate, and the voiceless. Vast agricultural expanses have been removed from the hands of small farmers and consolidated into enormous holdings for the export trade. Dams, which destroy untold biological species, also breed illnesses such as schistosomiasis and malaria.

Doctors should be especially aware of the bank's role in reversing social welfare during the 1980s. By creating a reverse negative flow of funds from poor South to rich North the bank has failed in its role as a "development agency." To prevent debt meltdown and provide quick fixes of foreign exchange, it has exacerbated the debt crisis with its "structural adjustment" programmes, which reduce public spending on social services and health. This has particularly affected Africa, where a slowing down, or even reversal, of the decline in infant mortality, plus deteriorating nutrition and reduced access to health and education are reality for most people.

This book is, however, more than just a critique of the World Bank. Rich uses the bank as an example of a wider global environmental sickness, one of lack of accountability and lack of attention to local knowledge. He sees hope in the growth of grassroots communities, increasingly intercommunicating, such as the Indian Chipko movement and the Brazilian rubber tappers' resistance.
For most of the world "development" has simply failed to materialise, and this failure encourages the spread of ethnic and regional nationalism and religious fundamentalism. Yet a highly readable book questions the post-Rio philosophy of centralised "sustainable economic development," epitomised in the bank's new Global Environment Facility. This important book contributes significantly in the struggle to save our human habitat. I hope that the bank will spend its 50th birthday considering its critics. —DOROTHY LOGIE, general practitioner, Medbourne

Companion Encyclopedia of the History of Medicine

Ed W F Bynum, Roy Porter
Routledge, £150, pp 1806
ISBN 0-415-04771-4

W e should not ignore our history, but how can we learn about it when there is so much other pressure on our time? One of the most frustrating things about the history of medicine is the lack of any single overview that does the subject justice. The standard books that usually sit at the dusty end of the library do all the things that the modern historian abhors: they pluck up in a hurry, but it should be a leisurely and rational process. The extraordinary ingenuity of today's cardiologists is shown by this picture in Catheter Ablation of Arrhythmias (Futura, ISBN 0-87993-580-4), which aims at presenting the topic "in as complete a form as possible." Catheters are seen in the high right atrium (HRA), near the His bundle (HS), in the coronary sinus (CS), and in the apex of the right ventricle (RV). The ablation catheter (ABL) is also shown.

Making Sense of Partnerships

Ed Norman Ellis, Tony Stanton
Radcliffe, £13.50, pp 116
ISBN 1-87095-62-8

Disputes tend to bring out the worst in human nature. We act reasonably and rationally most of the time, but when a dispute occurs reasonableness and rationality may go out of the window, and people simply fail to communicate effectively. The extraordinary ingenuity of today's cardiologists is shown by this picture in Catheter Ablation of Arrhythmias (Futura, ISBN 0-87993-580-4), which aims at presenting the topic "in as complete a form as possible." Catheters are seen in the high right atrium (HRA), near the His bundle (HS), in the coronary sinus (CS), and in the apex of the right ventricle (RV). The ablation catheter (ABL) is also shown.

I would particularly recommend the book to doctors who have just finished vocational training and are applying for partnership.—PETER GRAY, doctor and barrister, Canterbury, Kent

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