

Carl Jelenko and Charles F. Frey (eds.), *Emergency Medical Services: An Overview*. Bowie, Maryland: Robert J. Brady Co., 1976, 343 pp., US \$ 22.95.

The accumulated evidence of clinical naïveté and unreasonably high expectations as to the efficacy of emergency medicine suggests that investigators interested in disaster research and program planners concerned with mass emergencies have much to learn about the clinical and administrative complexities of EMS. They will not learn it from this outrageously overpriced book. The editors give the game away in the Preface when they describe the “28 national leaders” contributing chapters as “innovators of change and effectors of progress... none are merely observers or historians”. The latter is clear although the condescending use of the word “merely” to diminish the role of thoughtful understanding is not. The “experts” became so, we are told, despite not being... trained in public health, epidemiology, local or state politics, or in the sciences of organization and cybernetics...” The editors, with a plaintive plea appropriately reminiscent of used car salesmen, vouchsafe that “each had a sense of community responsibility, vision, and idealism that enabled him to recognize the need to improve care...”

The trouble with coming up through the ranks to national “expertness”, as it were, is that one inevitably ends up an insufferable bore, and an iconoclastic parochial one at that. Asked to address an important issue from a national perspective, they each give an autobiography. Chapter 6 is entitled “Field Treatment and Transportation” but is a description (merely, as it were) of Jacksonville, Florida. Chapter 10 is “Education and Research in the Emergency Department” but consists mainly of a description of a 4-week interdepartmental emergency department clerkship during the fourth year at the University of Rochester School of Medicine and a 1974 postgraduate course, both organized by the authors, and

two unreferenced studies under way at Strong Memorial Hospital. The same authors in Chapter 17 under the title “The Functions and Administration of a University Emergency Department” describe the way things are at the Strong Memorial Hospital. Apparently one of the ways things are there is an observation area”... an important part of the department (because) occasionally, it is not immediately clear what should be done for a patient, and a period of observation may solve the problem”. Although it may well be “not clear” at Strong, in most emergency departments (whether university based or not) it is: you treat and discharge or you admit, as the Editors point out in an extended and embarrassed footnote. Chapter 23 is entitled “Critical Care Medicine Facilities and Personnel” but is mainly from previously reported work of the authors in drawing guidelines for the development of general ICU’s in Western Pennsylvania. Much of it had also been previously published as Chapter 4 in *Public Health Aspects of Critical Care Medicine and Anesthesiology*, P. Safar (ed.), Philadelphia: F.A. Davis Co., 1974.

Other chapters are often outdated, unoriginal, not comprehensive, and sometimes wrong. Chapter 1 on “Acute Illness and Injury in the United States” is remarkably reminiscent of the 1966 National Academy of Science’s document, *Accidental Death and Disability* and states that, “A reporting system must be designed to identify the type of accidents..” In fact, such a system has not only been designed but has been in operation (as the National Electronic Injury Surveillance System) for over 5 years. Chapter 3, “The Accident Problem” ignores the work of Haddon, Baker, Robertson and others as well as the entire area of human compliance with restraint systems. Chapter 4 on “Motor Vehicle Trauma and Emergency Medical Services” is overly dependent on out of date editions of the National Safety Council’s *Accident Facts*. Because the 1972 issue shows a three percent

increase in motor vehicle deaths over 1971, the authors assume incorrectly that they continue to rise. (In fact, they declined precipitously and independently of EMS.) The authors do urge the readers: "For the most current statistics, see the most recent issue of *Accident Facts*. For \$ 22.95, the reader is told to check a more recent issue! Of the 25 chapters, the senior or sole authors of 22 are M.D.'s, the rest being made up of a Director of Public Safety, a retired Brigade General, and an attorney. Chapter 14 on "The Role of the Nursing Staff in the Emergency Department" is written by the past president of the American College of Emergency *Physicians* and in a tone that would not have disgraced Sadat writing on the role of Jewish settlement in the Sinai. Chapter 19 on "State and Area-wide Planning of Emergency Health Services" talks of "Comprehensive Health Planning 'B' Agencies" (which no longer exist) and ignores Health System Agencies (which do).

The editors have made little attempt to integrate the chapters or, indeed, to edit at all. Chapters grossly overlap and are often inconsistent: Chapter 8 is on "Emergency Medical Technician Training" while Chapter 9 is on "Emergency Medical Technician Training and Salary". Chapter 11 is "The Emergency Physician and his Residency Training" while Chapter 12 is "Training of the Emergency Physician". There is no index. The same term means different things in different chapters, while different phrases seem to have the same meaning in some. The chapter with greatest potential relevance for disaster researchers is "Airport Emergency and Disaster Preparedness Planning" by Francis C. Jackson who attended many disasters as chairman of the AMA Committee on EMS and whose cheerful cooperation in many disasters investigators will have experienced personally. This chapter outlines the investigative and operating procedures of the FAA and the NTSB, describes the disaster plan at O'Hare and Kennedy and discusses clinical aspects of (but not organisational responses

to) 4 aircraft crashes. This chapter and book can be safely ignored by those interested in mass emergencies and should be read with extreme caution by those whose curiosity outweighs their judgment.

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