

recognition of a different group of practitioners. It considers the range of women who practiced medicine and science, and circumstances under which they did so. It asks what these issues can tell us about the level of education, general knowledge and interests of women in England at this time. Studies of this period have engaged in lengthy debates about the role of women, particularly the perceived distinction between science as masculine and the feminine private sphere. *Women, Science and Medicine* is a fascinating and innovative set of essays which indicates that women's involvement in a range of scientific and medical practices was far more substantial than has been recognised previously. Not only is this an interesting issue in itself, but it interrogates the assumption of 'inherently' gendered practices, and the origin of distinctions between male and female practitioners of science and medicine.

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Sex and Suffering. Women's Health and a Women's Hospital: The Royal Women's Hospital Melbourne 1856-1996. By Janet McCalman. Melbourne University Press 1998. Pp. xii + 420. \$39.95 cloth.

It has become customary for reviewers of hospital histories to note the lack of a patient voice. The project that resulted in the publication of Janet McCalman's *Sex and Suffering* has, therefore, evoked great interest. Access to the medical records of the hospital meant that this history would include, and possibly even centre around, the women who sought treatment from the hospital's medical and nursing staff. The book has been eagerly awaited. It has been worth the wait.

This study traces the evolution of modern obstetrics and gynaecology, along with the necessary and parallel advances in pathology, medical imaging and anaesthetics, but it does so not from the doctors' view point alone. The text is rich in case studies of individual women, their social and economic situations, their distress and the course of their treatment. It is not always pleasant reading: graphic descriptions of medical treatment prior to the development of anaesthesia and antibiotics leave little to the imagination.

The hospital was founded in 1856 by Dr Richard Tracy, Dr John Maund and a concerned group of women lead by Mrs Frances Perry. Tensions were apparent from the start, with Tracy adamant that all women, regardless of marital, social or moral status, should be permitted entry, but for decades there would be continuing debate over whether the hospital itself would suffer if women of uncertain moral character were permitted entry. Ex-nuptial births were one such dilemma, even into the twentieth century.

Both Maund and Tracy had trained in Scotland, and brought to Melbourne 'the Simpson legacy of "obstetrical science"' (p. 11). Tracy was a keen observer and a good record-keeper, like many who followed after. He was also a disciplinarian. When the first purpose-built hospital was erected in Madeline Street (later Swanston Street), its design manifested the order and control Tracy sought over both infection and his patients. McCalman follows the issues of discipline and regimentation through the years with skill and sensitivity, seeing things from both sides of the bed sheets. She also insists that her readers try to understand the ways in which Tracy and his cohorts understood pregnancy, birth and menstruation, their limited knowledge of disease and infection and the limited range of instruments with which they could work. The early pages are crammed with definitions of medical terms, illustrations of instruments, line drawings of pelves and anatomical dissections. Explanations of medical terms are placed in the margins, as are many of the illustrations, hence some pages are intimidating, but the style works, although I would have found a glossary useful for continued reference.

One of the difficulties faced by McCalman was the question of readership: for whom was she writing? The writing style changes throughout the book. Long, detailed medical descriptions dominate the earlier sections, with the more accessible social history towards the end of the book. In many of the former, medical knowledge is taken for granted, as in the presentation of the syphilitic Mrs. M.F. (p. 100). We read that 'significantly', she had not carried a foetus to term for five years, but the significance is lost unless the reader knows that congenital syphilis, passed to the foetus across the placenta, leads frequently to miscarriage. Chapter 9, based on the extern midwifery case books of 1921-31, is McCalman at her very best, teasing out the attitudes of middle-class doctors, and their interpretation of working-class family life and home environs, matched by a rich glimpse of the working-class culture surrounding childbirth. It has echoes of McCalman's

Struggletown and does much to balance the abnormal deliveries which dominate the internal hospital material.

A second problem is the internal integrity of the study. McCalman is at pains to point out the time it took for the clientele who approached the Hospital to be seen and treated as women in their own right, rather than patients, 'un-married mothers', and such. We watch the ways in which the women were de-humanised by the very hospital that was meant to protect them at their most vulnerable time. Yet the problem is perpetuated by many of the photographs used in the text. While almost all staff appearing in photographs are named, women photographed with their infants remain nameless, subsumed under titles such as 'Domiciliary care' (p. 258), 'Dutch family with eleven children' (p. 259); 'New Australians All' (p. 261), etc. Hospitals are notorious for taking publicity photos without recording the names of the patients but this can potentially be overcome by an explanatory caption rather than continuing the depersonalised graphing of 'mother and baby' (p. 269).

Likewise the discussion of confinement of C.C., a seventeen-year old 'rachitic dwarf', recorded in Dr Fetherston's Casebook from the 1880s (pp. 103-4). McCalman notes that the young woman was 'so angry and frightened at her first admission ... that she refused to speak. She was measured from head to foot, prodded and probed and required to be photographed naked'. The inference was that C.C. had been humiliated by the doctors' curiosity. To deliver her, Dr Balls-Headley performed the first successful caesarian section at the hospital, resulting in the survival of both C.C. and her healthy female baby, an apparent happy ending. Why then does McCalman once more, metaphorically at least, continue to humiliate this woman. Her's is the only naked photograph in the text. This is not a medical text-book where we might expect to find such intrusions in the name of medical science. It seems like a further example of the double standard, as the intrusion continues, and raises again the difficulty of writing for a mixed audience.

A third problem is with the depiction of women as victims, their pregnancies and diseases brought on by male lust and selfishness. The battle with infection, before the developments of antibiotics and penicillin in the middle of this century, is vividly described. The nurses took the battle to heart and, McCalman writes, the 'war against the germ had become a gendered combat. The intruder in the feminised, sanitised and moralised world of the hospital was male. It was the

male world of sexual desire which brought disease and unwanted pregnancy' to the patients; it was the male doctors and their 'overweening authority' that brought suffering to the nurses (p. 90). McCalman writes of 'too many dirty little working-class men with dirty little habits' (p. 152). Women often, and perhaps mostly, were victims, but McCalman does not recognise female sexuality as a force equal to that of the male until she introduces the discussion on the development of the oral contraceptive pill. We have to wait till page 162 to learn that '90 per cent of pregnancies were normal' circa 1920, and we have no figures for earlier times. The Hospital's records present a biased sample of women who sought treatment at a time when home-births were the norm, a self-selected abnormal sample. That many of the woman might have regretted their sexual encounters that resulted in unwanted pregnancies and disease is true, but that they never sought such sexual pleasure is almost certainly not true. The same battle against disease and infection was occurring in the wards of the Melbourne Hospital, where many male patients were admitted, also 'victims' of venereal disease from sexual contacts.

The book has approximately 200 pictures. If you exclude the picture on the title page which is never explained, the first picture is of Swanston Street, Melbourne, in 1858, providing the setting for the long walk faced by Miss Bridget Kelly in 1866, a description of which so dramatically starts the book. Few of the pictures have a caption that explains their significance. There are pictures of the old pavilion wards with the Sister's desk in the centre, now a thing of the past (pp. 127, 154, 206, 211). Another series records 'students', presumably medical students, photographed holding babies, a tradition that extended for a century or more, but where it came from, and why, is never explained (pp. 169, 172, 193, 225, 281). Who are the single, named women holding 'the Three Caesars' (p. 163)? What military uniform was Sister Hester Maclean wearing when photographed, and likewise Dr Fetherston (pp. 89, 94)? Did Dr Balls-Headley suffer an arm amputation in the later part of his career (p. 118)? Why the caption-less picture on page 184? (There are too many editorial errors — words omitted, typing errors, etc., for a work of this stature, e.g., pp. 98, 108, 129, 226, 236).

This is a pioneering study of a hospital and its clientele. It will be read differently by medical and lay readers. It is, perhaps, overly long, but the detail is rich and absorbing. The significance of increasing medical knowledge, of improvements in surgical skills and the remark-

able developments in the clinical sciences, especially pathology and biochemistry is well documented by their liberating impact of women's reproductive health, and this is the major achievement of this study. Whether other hospitals will follow this example and commission histories which involve the patient experience remains to be seen, but this study of women's health and a women's hospital sets a high standard for those who follow after.

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Bricks or Spirit? The Queen Victoria Hospital Melbourne. By Emma Russell. Australian Scholarly Publishing 1997. Pp. vii + 139. \$24.95 paper.

What makes a hospital — bricks or spirit? This important question receives an equivocal answer in Emma Russell's analysis of the foundation and fate of the Queen Victoria Hospital in Melbourne. Dame Mabel Brookes, President of the Hospital from 1924 to 1970, asserted that 'no-one minded what one did for it'. However, the story of the final decades of the Hospital reveals that others did not mind that what they did eroded the aim of the founders to provide a 'safe' medical environment for women where they were treated by women and spared the ordeal of the prying eyes of male medical students. These days few of the bricks of the Hospital survive, and in the wake of the move to a new building in Clayton, and a new identity as the Monash Medical Centre, its spirit appears to be a fading memory, alive mainly among those who worked there when it was still the Queen Vic, as it was affectionately known.

What was the aim of those who commissioned this history as part of the centenary celebrations of the Hospital in 1996? Did they want it to be a memorial to the women who founded the Hospital and the men who supported them? Did they want a record of the achievements of the Hospital and its staff? Did they want to explain why or how the Queen Vic ceased to exist? Those who commissioned the history have obtained a good, clear overview of the Hospital's foundation and demise, with some details about the decades in between. The final impression is that they wanted a justification of the Hospital, a