

*Canberra's Health: 1950—1994, A Stormy Growth, an oral history through doctors.* Keith Powell, (Brolga Press, Gundaroo 1999). xiv + 394. c. \$40, paper. Obtainable from the author, 84 Buvelot Street, Weston, ACT, 2611.

*A social and cultural history of medicine in New South Wales, the Southern Tablelands and Cooma Monaro.* ed. A. J. Proust; (published by A. J. Proust, 10/38 National Circuit, Forrest, ACT, 2603, 1999). x + 343. c. \$40, paper. Obtainable from the author.

These two self-published histories of medicine in the Canberra-Monaro-Southern Tablelands region will be of immense use to historians, policy analysts and medical pundits. Both document medical practice, policy and experience in times and places that have received little attention from historians. A. J. (Tony) Proust is a retired physician who practised in the region for over forty years and who has devoted three years to the research and writing of most of this volume. Local historians have provided chapters on small hospitals and medical practitioners in a number of communities, but the bulk of the work has been done by Dr Proust. The doctor as pioneer, practising a courageous frontier medicine, often with remarkable skill, is one of the important stories of European expansion over this continent. The doctor as social broker between classes, races, sexes, and between metropolitan culture and the bush—is also crucial to that story. The nuts and bolts of early medical practice and hospital service have to be recorded as quickly as possible, and this Dr Proust's volume accomplishes with admirable detail. It will be a well-raided resource for historians and students for decades to come.

Keith Powell's study *Canberra's Health, 1950—1994*, is of a different order. This is a book which has grown out of what was clearly a deeply-felt personal professional experience. Canberra's medical profession has been distinctive. The community is part urban and part country town; it has some of the attractions of the state capital cities, and some of the limitations of the isolated rural community. It takes a particular type of doctor to make a career commitment to such a community, especially if he or she is anxious to rise within a specialism. It is meant to be a self-sufficient medical community, but still patients are forced to make the trip to Sydney for certain procedures. Does starting practice in Canberra by definition say something about lower aspirations or are many legitimately seeking the quieter life of the provincial city?

Canberra has also been unique in its access to Commonwealth government funding. It has had the most generously endowed public sector in the country. It also possesses a disproportionate share of the nation's intellectual capital, both in the government sector and in the Australian National University, with its research schools of international standing. It was, until the advent of the Howard government, the place for new ideas about constructing a good society. And it had the money and the will to experiment.

The result was a tense, prolonged conflict between a conservative medical profession which was determined to 'go it alone' and a cohort of *progressive doctors* who saw the opportunity to bring the government sector into the clinic. The ideological differences were deep and damaging, to the point of being almost 'disastrous for the health professionals and the patients'.

This history has been amassed from interviews with *ninety-one* doctors and thirteen other professionals, plus a wide archive of personal and public files. It is detailed and candid. It provides an invaluable record of an intense period of medical politics which will be of continuing interest and relevance to the conduct and history of health policy and professional organisation for many years to come.

Janet McCalman  
University of Melbourne

*Sex and Medicine: gender, power and authority in the medical profession*, Rosemary Pringle. (Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 1998), x + 240.

Many endeavour to navigate the turbulent seas of gender and work, however few successfully reveal the subtleties of the gendered workplace in a way which is both theoretically mature and linguistically understandable. In *Sex and Medicine*, Rosemary Pringle charts the historical voyage of women in medicine, and examines the struggles and successes which have accompanied these travels. Pringle embarks with the reader upon a journey into the complex world of power and gender, however her feminist perspective is not forcefully thrust upon the reader. Instead, Pringle displays the complexities of sex and medicine upon the foreshore for observation, rarely pronouncing judgment.