the incidence of ovarian and uterine cancers that has been diminished by approximately 50% among users of oral contraceptives. Some bad advice offered is for women to use pain medication before finding out what is causing their dysmenorrhea, implying that doctors will do unnecessary surgery if they see the patient first.

Dr Smith, who accuses American physicians of arrogance, ends with "Epidemiology: Restructuring Health Care in America." Despite numerous experts both in and out of medicine grappling for years with the subject, nobody really coming up with a clear-cut way of resolving the complex issues of cost and access, the author devotes seven pages to the problem, including some vague proposals about federal agencies. He extols health maintenance organizations for keeping medical health care costs down but neglects to mention that when he started with HMOs in the 1970s, they took low-risk young individuals and excluded high-risk patients. Now that HMOs must deal with an aging population, most find their costs spiraling in the same way as other medical providers.

The field of obstetrics and gynecology has seen needed change in recent decades. I have been very active in a number of issues relating to women's rights, including obtaining rights for husbands to be in the delivery room ten years before Dr Smith did so in Denver. While I might accept many of Dr Smith's premises, he has written a book more bombastic than enlightening, aimed more at book sales than educating the public.

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Suicide

Suicide is not a neglected area in the medical and mental health fields. Even before the 1897 publication of Emile Durkheim's anchoring work on the subject, efforts at preventing suicide were well known. This work of Ronald W. Maris and 44 others, structured around the question of predicting suicide, provides an excellent update on empirical findings and theory in suicidology.

When the issues of assessing and predicting the act of suicide are addressed, we quickly learn that these tasks are best separated. In brief, the conclusion offered is that for several reasons the prediction of the individual suicide is an insuperable task (pp 4, 128, 218, 632, 641). Rather, the rational effort of the clinician and researcher is most constructively directed at assessing or predicting the probable risk of suicide within a given time frame.

The failure to predict individual suicides is rooted in several factors. The attempt at prediction is a forced choice of only one out of two possibilities, while the actual occurrence in the general population is once or twice in 10 000 individuals per year. Even more important, however, is that, when the clinician concludes that significant suicidal risk is present, little effort is made to prevent the predicted act.

As with any complex human behavior, forces at other levels of the biopsychosocial hierarchy must be considered. Thus, while suicide by definition is an individual's intentional self-destruction, the behavior is shaped by influences at work in the social milieu. A measurable one, which has come under increasing scrutiny, is the mass media. Phillips, Leysna, and Raft summarize the research findings in this area (chapter 24). Newspaper and television accounts of celebrity suicides are followed by a transient rise in suicides, particularly among teenagers (p 505). The effect of television airing of suicidal acts extends to fictional presentations, an increase in attempted and fatal suicides following dramatic portrayals of suicide in both the United States and Europe. The response to fictional suicides is well known and has been labeled the "Werther effect" after a character in a work by Goethe, which signaled a wave of youth suicides across Europe in the late 18th century. The media effect on suicide rates has led to rewarding efforts in curbing sensational presentations of suicide, which apparently serve as "natural advertisements" for suicide (p 499).

The subject of suicide is an evocative one that all too often is accompanied by pet theories and one-liners. The present volume has nearly completely avoided this pitfall, many of the knowledgeable contributors reminding us that suicide is a rare behavior (pp 5, 7, 27, 108, 127, 202, 534, 647). Only on the topic of youth suicide do the authors slip into the dramatic descriptor "epidemic proportions" (p 420) and offer an unfounded approach to prevention in a school-based program. While there has been a rise in youth suicide in the past two decades, the rates for ages 15 to 24 are lower than for any older age group (p 489). It is important to have a long view of what may appear as an epidemic. The suicide rate of persons 15 to 24 took a sharp rise around 1965 and dropped off sharply by 1920, and there is a suggestion that the rate in that group has begun now to level off after a peak increase. More important, the rush to school-based programs for youth suicide prevention has lacked an empirical base, produced no measurable benefit, and consumed precious health care resources.

Given the challenge of a broad-ranging, multiauthored text, the editors have achieved a well-knit work with only the necessary amount of repetition and overlap in its 32 chapters. One of their effective means of tying the skeins together is that of having each special viewpoint focus on a common set of clinical vignettes. Midway in the volume are presented five cases of potential suicide (chapter 12) in various degrees of detail. The several authors offer their assessments of the cases and gauge the suicidal risk involved. In the last chapter of the book we are then given the follow-up and outcome of the cases, and the efforts of the assessors are reviewed. If you read this book, you can do the same, ie, study the vignettes and arrive at your own suicidal risk assessment. You can then turn to the last chapter to find out what happened in the follow-up period and gauge your own success at suicide risk assessment.

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Books in Brief

Breast Cancer

If there are a dozen or more memoirs of breast cancer in print, it is because it is indeed an epidemic. To the list add My Breast: One Woman's Cancer Story. Journalist Joyce Wadler recounts diagnosis, surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy with clarity, candor, and a continuous, irreverent humor. She touches on, among other things, second opinions, multispecialty care, and, through the eloquent words of a social worker, the problem with the idea that a positive mental attitude prevents cancer, with its sad blame-the-victim corollary. In her afterword, breast cancer specialist Dr Susan Love corrects impressions, some, as she notes, ironically the result of public service messages, and sounds a strong call for more attention to this affliction of one in nine women.

Gait

This publication includes 21 chapters describing in detail all elements of the normal and abnormal gait cycle and its...
various phases. Roles played by the joints and various parts of the skeletal system and muscles involved are explained and discussed. High-quality figures and sketches ably assist the reader in comprehending the text. Several chapters are devoted to pathological gait patterns, mechanisms, and gait deviations due to pathological conditions of the various joints in the lower extremities, trunk, and pelvis.

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Physiology


Public Health

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Surgery
