

BOOK REVIEWS

Where no skin specialist is available, Behl PN and Aggarwal A: Skin Institute Publication, New Delhi, 1984; pp 40, Price Rs. 20.00

It is a well known fact that even at the best of places, the teaching of dermatology to the medical graduates in the medical colleges is far from adequate. This is chiefly because of the faulty notions of the administrators of medical education. Consequently, the knowledge among the lay public is even worse. In fact, there are more misconcepts. One of the easiest ways of correcting this void in knowledge is to write books on dermatology. This indeed, is happening and no doubt books on dermatology are extremely popular among the general practitioners. The recent book WHERE NO SKIN SPECIALIST IS AVAILABLE by Professor P. N. Behl and A. Aggarwal is primarily meant for the community workers, the non-medical workers, the barefoot doctors and the like, including lay public. This book essentially contains health education material. In a book of this type, it is very essential that the language is easy, clear and unambiguous so that the reader should have no confusion in the interpretation of the instructions. Dr. Behl has made adequate efforts to provide basic information about the care of skin and hair and simple remedies for the common skin ailments. The suggested remedies are largely those which are available in the rural areas where a large number of the dermatological patients exist and where there is generally no dermatologist.

I however, have some differences of opinion with the author. For instance I do not like the idea of wasting eatable materials for medicinal purposes, chiefly because eatables are already

so scarce, that it is unethical to use them for the care of skin. Secondly, massage of the hair (and the body) with oils only means wastage of the oil and the shampoo, because so far no oil has been discovered which has the ability to grow hair or maintain them better. Thirdly, banana is known to contain 5-hydroxy-tryptamine which is considered to make urticaria worse. Therefore, banana should preferably be restricted in urticaria. Fourthly, it is known that the dietary fat does not contribute to the secretion of the sebaceous glands because sebaceous glands are secretory and not excretory glands. Therefore, dietary restrictions are no longer considered necessary in patients having acne. Fifthly, the greying of hair due to old age can not be equated with the development of vitiligo because vitiligo is not an aging process. Sixthly, sulphones for leprosy are no longer used for six days in a week and the initial small doses have been virtually given up. Similarly, most people do not recommend using prophylactic dapsone in the contacts of leprosy patients. Apart from these, there are at some places some vague statements, such as "combs should be kept meticulously clean", "only mild exposure to the sun is beneficial," and "predigested food" etc etc. These deficiencies, it is hoped will be removed in the next edition.

In spite of these, this book has immense merit and it will prove of great value to the people in the rural areas. Similar editions in the regional languages may prove even more useful especially for people who cannot read english.

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