as proof, to be couched in terms of reasoned objectivity. To a lawyer, however, not only is it the case that proof is simply a subjective measure of the probability of a proposition, but to make matters worse the standards of provability applied will vary depending on whether a case is being heard in civil or criminal proceedings. Small wonder, therefore, that doctors enter the territory of the lawyers with trepidation, when the very building blocks of their communication are disguised with different meaning. By the same token a true medico-legal text is almost impossible to write: the doctor-reader perpetually thinks he understands a meaning that the author-lawyer continually does not mean. So it is when lawyers write for doctors' consumption that the reader will often dismiss the text as being woolly, long winded and unclear. By contrast doctors writing for lawyers' consumption are sometimes thought of as somewhat inflexible, seeing things in black and white and expecting there to be an "answer" to any given situation. The true common ground between doctors and lawyers is sometimes as difficult to light upon as the hyphen in medico-legal.

This book does not really attempt to address the common ground between the professions (and therefore possibly expand this limited area of mutual understanding), written as it is through its multi-authorship of some 53 eminent doctors and lawyers. It can, however, claim with authenticity to be a weighty and comprehensive tome on the subject of medical negligence. Although this is a relatively narrow area of the law, Powers and Harris's methodical structuring of chapter headings covers the litigation procedure from alpha to omega, in the first twenty two chapters covering some 594 pages. This first half of the book, written predominantly by lawyers, will undoubtedly be confused by the legal profession on the grounds of its comprehensive and authoritative content but also sadly because here the lawyers will feel at home with the literary style in a way that doctors will not, because it is undeniably legal.

In their preface, Powers and Harris state "the principal generator of medical negligence litigation is communication failure. If the medical chapters were more widely read by senior medical students and young doctors in training we believe that standards of practice would improve and the incidence of medical negligence would begin to decline." While this is undoubtedly true it is perhaps a shame that the "legal" section of the book (chapters 1 to 22) have not been made a little more welcoming for the non-lawyer. The second half of the book, chapters 23-41, by contrast is written exclusively by medical practitioners. It is undoubtedly because of this that the text is much easier to read for the average doctor, although one is left with the nagging suspicion that for this audience the understanding of the legal issues gained by the reader would be less than their perception of the same. The medical section, however, provides a clear and unambiguous account of proper high standards to be expected in the specialties visited, adherence to which would certainly avoid the possibility of negligent acts.

In particular the contribution by Robin Touquet, Jane Fothergill, and Nigel Harris on accident and emergency departments and the speciality of accident and emergency care provides a comprehensive scheme for the running of a model A&E department. Although such an entity would clearly be a negligence-free zone, like all ideals it is somewhat flawed because it is almost certainly unachievable. One should not criticise, however, the pursuit of high standards; moreover by omission the nuances of the requirements of the law through Bolam (that is, an exploration of the boundaries of negligence) are not really addressed and therefore the reader is left not really knowing where the dangers lie; the high water mark is clear, the depth of the pool remains uncertain.

In summary this is an authoritative, definitive and comprehensive account of all aspects of medical negligence which is unparalleled in medical or legal literature. It is the only realistic choice as a work of reference for both doctors and lawyers interested in each others practice on a professional basis. At a price of £155.00, however, it is unlikely to be on the shopping list of the average undergraduate.

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The second edition of this beautifully bound book may be a good addition to an Accident and Emergency library. The photographs are excellent, and the details of superb quality. I have some reservations about some of the procedures, as in the case of thoracic drainage they still suggest using a trochar as a means of entrance, the drainage which in most ATLS teaching is now deprecated. Figure 241 (page 59) places the paddles for defibrillation in the wrong place.

In the section on minor injuries there is no mention of the treatment of finger tip injuries with simple Jelonet and Flamazine dressings, which gives as good results as grafting.

In general I think that the book is a superb text, but at the price of £134.50 it certainly will have its place in a well stocked departmental library rather than in the hands of individuals.

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