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Book review

Care of the Arthritic Hand. 4th Edn. By Adrian E. Flatt. Pp. 305. £31.50. C. S. Mosby: London. 1983.

Not unlike a Rolls-Royce, Adrian Flatt is one of our top quality exports. Trained at the London Hospital, he has been appointed Professor to one of the most prestigious units in the United States of America, has become a doyen of American hand surgery and national consultant for the United States Air Force.

He has revised his classic monograph on the care of the rheumatoid hand, which first appeared in 1963 and has deservedly reached a fourth edition. The editing has of necessity been radical, even extending to a change of book title, for the state of the subject has changed considerably. Although he says in his preface that he considers it no sin to split an infinitive, his English origins are fortunately reflected in the quality and style of the writing, which helps the reader considerably. To understand the nature and progress of a deformity requires an intimate knowledge of the anatomy and biomechanics of linked joint systems and the forces acting upon them. These are thoroughly and clearly explained. Under nonsurgical management some methods for protecting the hand against deforming forces are cited. One example relates to screw topped devices which are designed for 'right handed' use. If the role of the hands is

reversed in unscrewing them, then forces applied push the finger radially or in a counter ulnar drift direction.

There are some omissions of useful methods and techniques—for example, the Oakley splint in correcting deformity; the Harrison-Nicoll fusion peg, so useful for fixing small joints; the Mannefelt wrist fusion technique, especially when employed with the Day compression staple; the Nalebuff-Millender technique of dealing with swan neck deformity. It is I suppose difficult to bury one's own offspring. On page 254, referring to his own biflanged metal hinge prosthesis, the author says, 'I believe this device has rightly been generally abandoned in favour of a flexible implant,' and yet this edition contains 10 illustrations of this device against 6 of every other type of implant.

I feel the book deserves a better index and more extensive bibliography. The last sentence in the book is 'This edition is this bastard's view of the problem at this time. . .'. How refreshing to have an author print so frank an acknowledgement of the evanescent state of our knowledge in a rapidly advancing field.

This fourth edition will be a great help to all who deal with this disease and can be read with much benefit by non-medical staff such as physiotherapists and occupational therapists.

B. HELAL