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Medicine / Médecine

Disease, Medicine and Society in Canada: A Historical Overview. By Jacques Bernier. (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 2003. 38 p. ISBN 0-88798-207-7 \$6.)

The inclusion of *Disease, Medicine and Society in Canada* as one of the Canadian Historical Association's historical booklet series is both a boon and a drawback. As booklet n° 63, it joins a long list of titles by respected historians who have distilled much scholarship and brought it to a broader audience of general readers, students, and teachers. Typically, however, these booklets deal with a focused historical problem or issue, a particular geographic region, or a limited time period. Thus should an author instead choose to study the impact of disease and epidemics along with the development of the medical establishment while relating all to Canadian society at a national level spanning four centuries, readers should expect some slippage.

Bernier's account does manage to identify major milestones in the development of health care in Canada. One of the strengths of his work is the useful bibliography, which guides the student-reader to some of the main scholarship in the field—although it does contain a few typographical errors that could also hinder the tyro researcher. For such a short survey there are a few glitches (e.g. the first nursing school in Canada was founded in St. Catharines, not Toronto). The selection of some historical examples occasionally might be confusing to readers, such as the discussion of “Molbay Disease” (p. 4) without a fuller explanation of its derivation (i.e. “*le mal de la baie Saint-Paul*”); likewise the allusion to the introduction of the “therapeutic use of biological X-ray procedures” in the mid-twentieth century (p. 18)—does the author mean Cobalt-60 therapy? Mention of a rela-

tively minor private third party health payment programme (p. 22) in the context of state-sponsored universal health plans is odd (perhaps a tug o' the forelock to a later incarnation of the same organization that has funded Bernier, as he himself acknowledges). The inconsistent style for reporting mortality rates might also lead to confusion for the non-technical reader.

This brief study attempts to be national in scope, but there remains a concentration on the medical scene in Quebec. There is, of course, nothing wrong with such a focus, as health care is a provincial responsibility. But regional differences and priorities can shape patterns of disease and the practice of medicine. As Bernier notes, medical specialists in Quebec are credentialed through a unique provincial body, not the national, Ottawa-based Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons. Perhaps more problematic, however, is the lack of any allusion to the unifying power of federal health policy for Canada *qua* nation—a theme that would have helped locate this booklet in the larger Canadian Historical Association series. In this regard, Bernier might have made mention of Roy Romanow's Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada even if only in passing.

J.T.H. Connor

Biographical Note: J.T.H. Connor has written widely on the history Canadian science, technology and medicine. He edited the *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History/Bulletin canadien d'histoire de la médecine* for many years; he currently co-edits the McGill-Queen's series in the history of medicine. His most recent book, *Doing Good: The Life of Toronto's General Hospital* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), has won numerous awards. *Address:* National Museum of Health and Medicine, Armed Forces Institute of Pathology, Washington, DC 20307, United States of America. *Email:* <connorj@afip.osd.mil>