To the Editors:

**Buddhism and traditional medicine in Sri Lanka by Jinadasa Liyanaratne**

I wish to bring the attention of medical practitioners (both traditional medicine and Western medicine) and other interested readers to the above book. Professor Senaka Bandaranayake in his Preface states that this book "...initiates a new program to re-examine aspects of traditional learning and culture from a modern perspective. His series of studies on aspects of traditional Sri Lankan medicine forms the first serious and sustained scholarly attempt to examine the extant historical literature in the fields of pre-modern medical science and pharmacology. The importance of traditional medicine in the study of the history of science as well as in contemporary clinical applications is now well recognized. Liyanaratne brings to this project a lifetime devoted to highly focussed scholarship and detailed textual investigation. His work shows us that although Sri Lanka historical manuscripts have been the subject of modern scholarship for more than one hundred and fifty years, an enormous wealth of uncharted material and major research programs still lie ahead of us." This book covers several areas. These include: Buddhism and traditional medicine in Sri Lanka, Indian medicine in Sri Lanka and relations between South India and Sri Lanka in health and medicine; information on Sinhala medical manuscripts in Paris and the Bodleian Library, Oxford; information on Pali medicinal texts (Siddhārtha and Abhinava Madhavanidana); information on plants used in the ayurvedic sciences and on blood letting and remedies for snakebite. Although one has to be conversant in Pali to read the whole book I found certain chapters quite informative. It is published by Kelaniya University Press (ISBN 955-9044-354), and has 360 pages.

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To the Editors:

**Fecal incontinence after vaginal delivery**

The leading article on faecal incontinence after vaginal delivery (1) causes much concern. It is worthwhile highlighting some other related issues. Obviously this kind of problem causes much distress and impairs quality of life of mothers. They can give rise to psychological distress and anxiety and also anticipatory anxiety and emotional difficulties during subsequent pregnancies, unless dealt with effectively.

It has been demonstrated that the nature of the early mother-child interaction and healthy relationship are important in the formation of a secure attachment. The pattern of emotional communication between parent and child is very important. It can influence the child's future relationships as well. Maternal distress contributes to the development of psychological problems in children. It has also been shown that maternal mental illness is related to psychological difficulties in childhood. Studies done in the west based on clinic and general populations show important associations between maternal disorder in the parents and psychiatric problems in children (2).

A recent longitudinal study of parents and children has demonstrated that there could be a direct effect of maternal anxiety and depression on foetal brain development and a child's behavioural development (3). Another study has indicated that the level of maternal cortisol can be correlated with foetal cortisol levels (4). It has been shown also that anxiety level of mothers during pregnancy can be associated with increased uterine artery resistance (5).

Hence it is important to identify these mothers with incontinence early and deal with them effectively (including the psychological aspects), to improve the mother-child interaction so as to facilitate development of a healthy attachment and to minimise the emotional difficulties in mothers and children. It will also help to reduce the antenatal anxiety and distress during subsequent pregnancies.

References


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