Letter from Chicago: Flying down under



was in Australia in July when the shooting of Dr Victor Chang stunned the nation The newspapers carried huge headlines and patients wept on television At 54 Dr Chang was Australia's foremost cardiac surgeon, founder of a national heart programme that since

1984 had resulted in 197 heart transplants and 14 heart-lung transplants with a one year survival rate of 90%. His death in Sydney, following a brief argument with two young men who had tailed his car gave rise to speculations that he had been blackmailed, perhaps by a gang, or pressed into using unrelated living donor kidneys sold abroad

Such kidneys coming largely from China, cotten bought from poor peasants. Some are taken from people condemned to death, who may donate their organs in return for their families receiving compensation. But if they refuse their organs may be taken anyway, and one man in a particularly

gruesome case, was reportedly still alive when they began to remove his kidneys, so that he had to be taken back and shot again

As always for a long flight, good reading matter was essential, and three books kept me engrossed. Thomas Keneally's To Asmara was timely now that the Eritreans have prevailed over the Addis Ababa regime. During their long revolutionary war they maintained a remarkable subterranean system of schools and factories, and of hospitals where surgeons operated in relative safety while, overhead, MIG jets regularly strafed and destroyed everything on the ground. A remarkable piece of reporting by an enterprising author at considerable personal danger.

A revolution of a different kind, advocated by Tom Peters in *Thrwing on Chaos*, has many lessons for would be successful medical managers. For survival in an age of change and uncertainty he advocates flexibility, a passion for change, and a minimum of bureaucratic layers. Companies should involve their employees in planning and decision making, encourage them to take initiatives, and empower them to take action. New projects should be small at first and preferably experimental, because failure is the norm and success the exception, so one

might as well fail small rather than on a grand scale. Peters advocates working through fairly temporary interdisciplinary teams rather than through committees, learning from one's mistakes as one goes, and taking prompt action rather than forever planning. Other ingredients for success are tolerating diversity within organisations and encouraging the efforts of individuals and small teams. Managers need to learn to listen and spend more time in the front lines and less in their offices, concludes Peters in a book that is a must for anybody who still believes in centralised planning and monolithic management.

The aftermath of revolution is described in Notwithoutmy Daughter by Betty Mahmoody, an American woman who married an Iranian doctor and then found herself trapped in his country. She encounters an unfamiliar society, with large extended families where everybody is a "cousin", primitive sanitation, and different mores, including a morals police that arrests women for deviating from the prescribed dress code. Her account of her flight across the mountains of Kurdistan provided dramatic suspense and served to while away the long hours in the acroplane—GEORGE DUNEA, attending physician Cook County Hospital, Chicago. USA

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