The Diary of a Teenage Health Freak; The Diary of the Other Health Freak

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It's odd to realise that an entire new generation of Peter and Susie Paynes has grown up in the fifteen years since the appearance of the first of these titles. In between, there's been the TV series, teen heroes have come and gone, and the teenage reading market has been flooded with diaries that deal in a light-hearted way with the anxieties and excitements of the adolescent years.

The presentation has lost its novelty, it's true. The diary format, the mixture of fact and fiction, and the use of a variety of other formats within the book - magazine articles, questionnaires, even school test sheets - are now very familiar. But Peter and Susie have moved on too. They are using mobile phones and into texting. Susie, at least, is thinking about body piercing. The books have a back-up website for really anxious readers to consult. But even more important than their updating are the books' enduring qualities, particularly the skill with which the authors, both experts in child and adolescent health, get their message across. It's done with empathy and wit, mixing plain speaking with careful explanations that bring in all the proper technical terms. The books run the gamut of teenage preoccupations, from acne, through animal rights and exam stress, to eating disorders and sexually transmitted diseases. They treat them all with a seriousness that shows an understanding of the distorted scale of teenage terrors, when a zit on the chin can seem like a major tragedy. Against these horrors, they offer clear information and wise advice, and a comedy of the kind of errors that any teenager can make, putting everything into reassuring perspective.

It's possible to read the books from first page to last as a gentle, witty tragi-comedy, picking up all sorts of useful information and advice on the way. It's also possible, if you want to remind yourself of what Chalmydia is, or how to get through your exams, to consult the indexes and go straight back to what you want to know. Either way, these titles still have a place. And that's probably face down, open on an interesting page, on the floor by the bed, next to the orange peel and the mug with the congealed hot chocolate dregs.

Running Order: