



COMMUNITY NURSING

Research and recent developments

*G. Baker, J.M. Bevan, L. McDonnell and B. Wall
Croom Helm, London (1987)
310 pages. Price £10.95*

Four researchers based at the Health Services Research Unit, University of Kent, have produced this unique volume which brings together documentation relevant to the development of community nursing from 1974 to 1986. The work was funded by the Department of Health and Social Security and its main purpose was to identify, describe and assess schemes involving developments in community nursing services. An extensive survey of the literature including 25 relevant medical and nursing journals and a specially designed questionnaire sent to chief nursing officers in England are the main sources of information. DHSS and professional reports are carefully summarized; but regrettably Scottish Home and Health Department reports are not included.

The chapter on evaluative research is an intriguing analysis of relevant research using criteria which include type of author and location, size and design of study. The implicit assumption that a large study must be better is open to question. Also, the authors seem to equate quantitative with objective and elevate the randomized controlled trial to a position of unquestionable superiority in research design — both debatable points.

Priorities for future research are identified and a structured approach to the creation of a data base with wider dissemination of good ideas and practices is recommended.

This book will be a welcome windfall for researchers in the field and should be of interest to teachers in community care topics, especially general practitioners and community nursing lecturers, to administrators and to policy makers.

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MEDICINE AND LABOUR

The politics of a profession

*Steve Watkins
Lawrence and Wishart, London (1987)
272 pages. Price £6.95*

I am not sure who will read this book on the political workings of the medical profession; Dr Watkins indicates in his introduction that he is directing it at the labour movement in its widest sense.

He endeavours to explain the medical profession and its institutions, widely regarded as a bastion of the right wing, as a depoliticized body of professional people, which, owing to the historical solidarity of the profession, appears monolithic but is actually much more complex.

As a participant in many of the events which he uses to illustrate the role of the British Medical Association in political activities over the past few years I enjoyed reading most of the chapters and seeing these events through the author's Medical Practitioners Union oriented eyes. However, in the chapters on industry and medicine, and politics and public health I found myself bogged down in a plethora of words and ideas. In the latter chapter he seemed to be speaking as a community physician about the internal relationships between branches of the profession in a way which could confuse rather than enlighten an outsider.

He develops well the theme that the depoliticization of medicine has actually made it more powerful in political circles and the examples he gives of the BMA's scientific opposition to nuclear war and its fight against the Police and Criminal Evidence Act in support of confidentiality are interestingly and accurately described. His analysis of the profession's political stance, and of its left wing element in particular, is penetrating and illuminating. He points out that the latter has failed in the past because it has been more political than professional and has not heard and heeded the voice of the profession at large.

As a bridge building exercise between the medical profession, as embodied in the BMA, and the labour movement this is a positive effort to show the left wing that they do not lose their political identity by becoming part of the establishment but can benefit their cause where there is common interest. This is not surprising as Steve Watkins is himself a committed member of the Medical Practitioners Union and BMA Council. Whether the book will be read by those at the other end of the political spectrum I do not know, but I certainly commend it to them.

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MILD HYPERTENSION: IS THERE PRESSURE TO TREAT?

*W.E. Miall and Gillian Greenberg
Cambridge University Press (1987)
222 pages. Price £25.00*

Now that the results of the Medical Research Council's Working Party on Mild to Moderate Hypertension have been so widely published in the medical and lay press, I was surprised at first that there was anything to write a book about. But there was, and it makes fascinating, if not always easy, reading.

The trial was a prodigious effort — 12 years in the making, costing £4 million and covering 17 300 people from 179 practices. In 12 short chapters Drs Miall and Greenberg cover the treatment and outcome of hypertension in the patients studied, compare the results with those of other trials and discuss the