



## **CORONARY HEART DISEASE PREVENTION**

**Action in the UK 1984–1987**

*National Forum for Coronary Heart Disease Prevention  
Health Education Authority, London (1988)  
240 pages. Price £4.95*

Students of medical history, observing the ridicule to which previous scientific theories are now subjected, might be excused for occasional feelings of discomfort about modern orthodoxies. Hidden in the pages of this book is the fact that the age-specific coronary heart disease mortality rates have been falling for the younger cohorts since 1975. Will coronary heart disease — like tuberculosis, rheumatic fever, peptic ulcer and appendicitis — relax its hold on the nation's mortality tables and health consciousness without our really understanding the reasons or being able to claim the victory for medical science? Such heretical ideas have no place in this book, which is a thoroughly orthodox and comprehensive review of the latest information on coronary heart disease prevention.

The book is divided into three sections. The first is devoted to an overview of coronary heart disease in the UK, the second to discussion of particular risk factors, and the third to the roles to be played by various bodies in the community (including a welcome chapter on the voluntary sector). Throughout, we are told what national government could be doing, but for the most part is failing to do. This includes action on the fat content of food and food labelling, tobacco consumption, provision of an environment conducive to healthy living and provision of effective health education in schools, this last being currently under threat from the proposals for a national curriculum. However, none of this dispels the tone of a gloomy school report for the nation: 'Despite some modest changes in behaviour, the UK is still coming very close to the bottom of the class and wasting a lot of money by its deplorable habits. It will have to try a lot harder in the future.'

Whispers are in the air that health education is set for a change in image from the puritanical 'pull yourself together and stop doing all these disgusting things to yourselves' model to a 'health is fun' approach. This book with all its information, figures and austere message may be a late if very fine example of a dying genre.

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## **USING PSYCHOSOCIAL COUNSELLING TECHNIQUES IN PRIMARY HEALTH CARE**

*Ellen Jespersen and P.F. Pegg  
Avebury, Gower Publishing Company, Aldershot (1988)  
169 pages. Price £19.50*

Laegernus Hus is a primary health clinic in western Denmark with four general practitioners and a primary care team serving

4700 patients. The two authors of the book, Ellen Jespersen and P.F. Pegg, worked at the clinic as a psychotherapist in primary care and as a consultant on the integration of psychosocial practices.

In 1982 the clinic was given a grant to carry out 'untraditional' practices such as family preparation therapy, counselling psychotherapy, alone and combined with physical treatment for the seriously ill, and other forms of therapy with women's groups, widow/widower groups and chronically ill patients. The basis of these treatment initiatives was to encourage patients to become self-reliant.

The aim of the book, however, is to demonstrate how existing principles of psychotherapeutic practice can be applied to general practice. To do this the authors, in some 160 tightly written pages, give details of some of the patients whom they have treated at the clinic; these range from the recently divorced and recently bereaved to those with serious family problems of one sort or another.

Although the book is interesting in parts, I found the laborious way in which the patients and their treatments are described tedious and boring. The style of presentation is rather reminiscent of a romantic novel and at times the book sounds too implausible, especially as almost every story ends in something like, 'and they all lived happily ever after'. In one case even the dog, a golden retriever, appears to have benefited from the 'brief therapy' afforded to its young master. Furthermore, the explanation of the therapy used in each case suffers inevitably from heavy jargon, for example: 'Tasks can be utilized to stimulate reflective, cogitative activities by the patients', or worse still: 'interventions are devised in response to cross generational involvements'.

In summary, although the book undoubtedly has an important message in the use of 'brief therapy' in the setting of general practice, its style and presentation often obscures its message.

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## **ELDERLY PEOPLE, THEIR MEDICINES, AND THEIR DOCTORS**

*Ann Cartwright and Christopher Smith  
Routledge, London (1988)  
180 pages. Price £27.95*

Cartwright and Smith's research was carried out in the summer of 1984 and this book represents the first account of the findings as no papers have yet been published. The study set out to examine the medicine taking habits of a representative sample of elderly people from the point of view of the elderly people themselves and the main prescribers of their medicines, their general practitioners. The sample was drawn from a wide geographical area and was complicated to construct, but the