



PREVENTING CANCERS

T Heller, L Bailey and S Pattison (eds)
Open University Press, Buckingham (1992)
 216 pages. Price £35.00 (h/b), £12.99 (p/b)

This Open University 'reader' is a collection of 22 short papers written for an Open University course entitled 'Reducing the risk of cancers.' It is essential reading for general practitioners who plan to undertake the course and it has the usual Open University attribute of making a potentially difficult subject accessible to virtually anyone, including any member of a primary health care team. It deals with theoretical issues (such as risk and cancer), policy issues (such as food policy and cancer) and practical issues (such as breast self examination), but it does not try to be all inclusive. As you would expect from a multi-author publication, some of the papers are of a high standard while others are of lesser worth.

I suspect that many people would enjoy taking the course, and just reading this book will give the uninitiated an insight into the scientific and ethical issues involved in cancer prevention. However, it will not provide a scientific review of the preventability of specific cancers or of the practical interventions which are of proven value.

DAVID MANT

*Clinical lecturer in general practice, University of Oxford and
 general practitioner, Oxford*

DEVELOPING TEAMWORK IN PRIMARY HEALTH CARE

Peter Pritchard and James Pritchard
Oxford University Press (1992)
 120 pages. Price £10.50

As organizations become more complex the importance of communication and teamwork is evident. However, many practices have failed to realize this and most primary health care teams exist in name only. There are many reasons for this.

General practitioners, who usually see themselves as leading the team, have neither the time nor the training to develop an effective team. By their very nature, most doctors are individualistic and prefer to work in a situation where only they make the decisions. This is not possible now as primary care becomes more complicated and a greater number of professionals are involved in the care of the patients. Lack of understanding, role conflicts and interprofessional rivalry add to the complexity of the modern primary health care team.

The authors of this book are well known for their activities in the field of improving teamwork and they have called upon their experience in this publication. They attempt to help practices develop an in-house training programme to improve their knowledge of teams and teamwork.

The book covers the principles of teamwork in relatively superficial detail and sets a number of tasks for the members of the team to complete before each meeting. It is suggested that

over the course of 13 one hour meetings the practice team can work together to improve their abilities. There is no doubt that given motivated participants and a willingness to make the exercise work, using these tasks will produce a better practice team. My main reservation is in the ability of an in-house leader being able to organize the groups and catalyse the activities. Someone will have to accept this responsibility and probably the person most suitable for this is the practice manager. Because of their central role in practice activities managers will see the advantages of teamwork and identify where the problems lie, but hierarchical problems, or lack of group skills, may hinder their adopting the leadership position. The suggestion that an outside resource may be needed, at least in the first instance, is probably true.

The aims of *Developing teamwork in primary health care* are laudable and practices who wish to improve their team will find it useful. Whether the exercises will be as valuable from the practical point of view, as the authors hope, remains to be seen.

KEITH BOLDEN

*General practitioner and senior lecturer, Department of
 General Practice, University of Exeter*

RISK-TAKERS: ALCOHOL, DRUGS, SEX AND YOUTH

Martin Plant and Moira Plant
Routledge, London (1992)
 176 pages. Price £10.00

How many of us, confronted by youthful excess, have asked ourselves 'Why do they keep doing it'? To some degree, this book addressed that question 'set[ting] out to put risk taking into a balanced perspective'.

Most of the book is about psychoactive drugs. After some discussion of the causes of drug consumption and a survey of drinking, smoking and drug taking habits, the risks of such behaviour are considered. The authors stress the link between risk taking in one area and similar behaviour in another. They particularly highlight the link between alcohol or drug consumption and sexual risk taking. This includes not only risking pregnancy or infection but also putting the fetus at risk. The authors' own work in Edinburgh has clearly contributed to the chapter concerning alcohol.

Most appealing to the general practitioner reader might be the sections on the common characteristics of risk takers and on prevention and harm minimization. Some jargon, such as 'social ecology,' creeps in, but on the whole this is a readable book full of authoritative contemporary evidence and a welcome degree of realism. Doctors having more than the average contact with adolescents, and those involved with drug counselling should certainly read this book.

RICHARD NEVILLE

General practitioner, Clitheroe, Lancashire