

THE GP'S GUIDE TO PROFESSIONAL AND PRIVATE WORK OUTSIDE THE NHS

Frank McKenna and David Pickersgill (eds)
Radcliffe Medical Press, Abingdon (1995)
160 pages. Price £15.00 (pbk)
ISBN 1857750748

This is one of a series of books produced by the British Medical Association with the common theme of the business side of general practice. It is edited by Frank McKenna and David Pickersgill, Head and Chairman of the Private Practice and Professional Fees Committee, respectively, so one is not surprised that the contents reflect the views of the BMA, and the advice given is very much what one would expect — namely, dry and factual, but rarely innovative.

The subjects covered are extensive, each with a chapter of its own and written by an 'expert' in the field. Nothing is left out which an active general practitioner who has time and energy to carry out work outside of his commitment to the NHS will want to explore. Inevitably, the quality of the content of each individual chapter varies from helpful and clear ('Medico-Legal Fees: Dealing with Solicitors and the Courts') to barely disguised apologia for the huge profits made by drug companies ('Pharmaceutical Trials'). Other subjects include 'Opportunities in Insurance Work', (which involves us all from time to time), 'Locum and Deputy Work' (mainly for the retired general practitioner or those working for the deputising services), 'Police Work' (for those with a strong stomach), 'Prison Work' (for those with reforming aspirations), 'Schools and Colleges Medical Officer' (for those that can stand the strain), 'Education' (for the academically orientated), and 'Sports Medicine' (for those fortunate enough to have a professional club near their surgery — apparently amateur clubs try not to pay anything).

In my experience, remunerative work outside the NHS usually comes by chance, either by entering a practice already involved in such work or by being in the right place at the right time. Until recently, an amateur approach to the work was the norm, but not surprisingly and quite correctly, one is now expected to have some vocational training and expertise to carry out this function. This book will guide one through the opportunities available, and point out the standards required and the pitfalls that may be encountered. From this point of view, it carries out its function well, and a copy would not be amiss in every training practice library.

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EVALUATING THE COST-EFFECTIVENESS OF COUNSELLING IN HEALTH CARE

K Tolley and R Rowland
Routledge, London (1995)
210 pages. Price £40.00 (hbk), £14.99 (pbk)
ISBN 0-415-07661-7

All general practitioners, whether fundholders or not, are likely to become increasingly involved in purchasing health care. While economics cannot claim to have all the answers as far as the effective and efficient use of resources is concerned, an economic evaluation can go a long way towards providing the necessary information to make such decisions. Tolley &

Rowland's book is welcome as it deals with a service which has grown rapidly in primary care over the past few years: counselling.

The book itself is part textbook, part cookbook. Part I, 'The principles of economic evaluation', consists of an overview of economic evaluation techniques. The differences between the various types of economic evaluation (e.g. cost-effectiveness versus a cost-utility analysis) are explained clearly. I particularly liked the way a number of key papers on whether or not counselling 'works' were subjected to an economic critical appraisal. Part II, 'The practice of economic evaluation', explores how one particular type of economic evaluation, cost-effectiveness analysis, can be used to evaluate the provision of counselling. A case study is provided which shows that it is feasible for a practice to examine the cost-effectiveness of employing a counsellor (with a little help from its FHSA and a local university department of health economics).

Evaluating the Cost-Effectiveness of Counselling can be recommended as an introductory textbook on economic evaluation with the added benefit that it deals with a topic of great interest in primary care. Quite whether it will prompt practices counsellors to perform an economic evaluation of their work is another matter.

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POSTGRADUATE TUTORIALS IN GENERAL PRACTICE

Edward Warren
Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford (1995)
218 pages. price £14.99 (pbk). ISBN 0750621648

The author of this book is an experienced trainer and has chosen a number of useful topics for tutorials. Each chapter contains suggested aims for the tutorial, a few relevant and up-to-date references, practical management suggestions, and discussions of controversial areas. He points out that registrars need to have easy access to important research material to use as a basis for practice, and suggests that trainers and their registrars read the chapter before the tutorial, so that both are on 'a level playing field' and use the material flexibly according to the learner's needs.

I showed this book to a few of the registrars on our vocational training scheme, and they were impressed by the clarity of the factual information contained in each chapter and thought that it would be a very useful textbook for studying for the MRCP. Course organizers planning a formal topic session for the half-day release would find the research references an excellent basis for the factual part of the discussion.

This is not a book about how to teach, and I found the aims for each tutorial topic rather limited: there are no examples of communication issues or encouragement for the registrar to think in terms of how an illness might affect the patient; and no mention of suggesting that the registrar identify his specific learning needs prior to a tutorial is made. Although the references are well chosen, they are all from journals, rather than from standard texts; for example, the chapter on bereavement does not refer to the work of either Colin Murray Parks or Peter Maguire.

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