

EPIDEMIOLOGY IN COUNTRY PRACTICE

Epidemiology in country practice is one of the most famous pieces of general practitioner research carried out in Europe since the first World War. First published in 1939, it reports the results of several years of Dr Pickles' work in a small, remote, general practice in Wensleydale, Yorkshire.

The book achieved world-wide renown and led to Dr Pickles receiving honours in many different countries. He was invited to give the Cutter Lecture at Harvard, was elected a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians of London and became the first President of the College of General Practitioners.

All who read this book will be struck by three of its characteristics: brevity, simplicity, and philosophy.

In these days when medical books arrive in ever-expanded volumes, when so many contain over a 1,000 pages it is indeed refreshing to re-read a masterpiece which says so much in only 107 small pages. Quite apart from the contents there is a lesson here which deserves to be more widely learnt.

Much of the interest, much of the charm, and most of the point of Dr Pickles' work lies in the simplicity of his methods. Here is cottage research in a cottage industry, advancing the frontiers of medical knowledge. At a time when so many research projects consist of teams of research workers with elaborate and expensive, computerised equipment, it is refreshing to see how much can be achieved by one whose only tools were pen and paper.

Thirdly, the book has considerable historical and symbolic importance. Written at a time when the age of specialism was fast emerging, and perhaps approaching its peak, at a time when generalists in many countries appeared to be on the retreat, it provided concrete evidence that major medical research did not have to take place inside institutions. It showed that important work can be done in people's homes.

By applying quite simple principles in meticulous detail, Pickles focused attention on the principles expounded by John Hunter. He followed in direct line from James Mackenzie, whose own work he acknowledged as an important influence.

A facsimile edition

It has been most unfortunate that such a book should have been out of print for such a time. It is therefore a particular pleasure to see it re-published by the Royal College of General Practitioners in aid of its current appeal (*June Journal*).

A special, *limited edition*, of 1,000 copies has been produced and these are exact facsimiles of the original book, with the addition of an introduction by Dr John Hunt. (*See advertisement in this Journal.*)

Most of the work in securing the copyright and arranging publication has been done by Dr R. M. S. McConaghey. The appeal committee can be congratulated on this imaginative idea of making available once more a classic, whose author *The Lancet* once called 'the grand old man of general practice'.

This small volume will never be out of date. It has already inspired one generation of general practitioners. We believe it will now do the same for the next.

REFERENCE

Pickles, W. N. (1939). *Epidemiology in country practice*. Facsimile edition. Republished 1972. London: Royal College of General Practitioners.