

STATISTICS AT SQUARE ONE

T. D. V. Swinscow

British Medical Association
London (1976)

86 pages. Price £1.50

The subject of statistics has for a long time been the Achilles heel of research in general practice. This is hardly surprising, as it was not taught at all to many who are now principals in general practice, and even today the very suggestion of determining statistical significance sends shudders down the spines of many enthusiastic general-practitioner research workers.

Although there are several books written for non-mathematicians, there is little doubt that there is still a great gap and that doctors in particular can be helped by medically slanted examples.

The *British Medical Journal* is to be congratulated for producing its recent series on statistics, written by its Deputy Editor, Dr T. D. V. Swinscow, and for covering a good deal in a series of short and simply described steps. This book brings together the articles in this series in only 86 pages.

To some extent the choice of material must be a matter of taste, and personally I would have welcomed rather more on non-parametric tests, which seem to have particular value in many general-practice studies. Although there is a chapter on rank sum tests, which includes Wilcoxon's, somehow this book does not emphasize that non-parametric tests are not merely an alternative to parametric methods but may actually be superior when the measurement can be made only in nominal or ordinal scales, and when normal distribution cannot reasonably be assumed.

It is to be hoped that further developments in simple statistics will follow and that this book will be available widely in the libraries of postgraduate medical centres.

D. J. PEREIRA GRAY

COUNSELLING AND ADVISORY SERVICES—ENGLAND AND WALES, DIRECTORY (2nd EDITION)

The Standing Conference of the Advancement of Counselling
26 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3HU (1976)

55 pages. Price 75p
(90p including postage)

Every week one of the quality Sunday papers mentions an organization set up to help a group of people with a com-

mon handicap or problem. A mental note is made to record the name and address of the organization, in case it may be of use to a patient. In my case I rarely get further than the mental note.

However, the Standing Conference of the Advancement of Counselling has produced a booklet which lists about 25 such agencies. These range from Alcoholics Anonymous and the Family Planning Association to less well known groups such as Gingerbread or SPOD. The information given on each group or agency is brief. For instance, the function of the Committee on Sexual Problems of the Disabled is to "stimulate public and professional awareness, to establish a centre for the collection and dissemination of information, and to provide a referral service for clients and to arrange for the training and education for those who work amongst the disabled in the sexual aspects of disability". The first part of this book is a geographical directory to counselling agencies throughout the country. My own town is not mentioned, and under Sheffield—30 minutes away—four agencies are listed. One of these I have used before and found very helpful. I had not heard of the other three. One group is a counselling service for homosexuals and two are counselling services for young people—not information one needs every day, but if the need did arise this booklet would save valuable time searching for addresses or telephone numbers which have been hidden on different bits of paper.

At 75p I think this is a useful booklet to add to other reference books on the practice shelf.

M. F. HASENFUSS

ACCIDENTS AND EMERGENCIES

R. H. Hardy

Robert Dugdale, Oxford (1976)

62 pages. Price £1.50

This is an excellent book containing in its 60 pages the basic principles of the management of the majority of problems seen in an accident and emergency department.

The author, Dr R. H. Hardy, accepts the limitations of any textbook of accident and emergencies "because of the lack of any generally accepted practice in the field", especially in the field of orthopaedics, where there is a greater degree of personal variation. He has therefore compiled a handbook containing the framework upon which individual practitioners can build. To make this practicable each right-hand

page is left blank for the practitioner to add his own notes: "What will be really valuable is what is written on the right." The text is clear and concise and it is arranged alphabetically for quick and easy reference. There is also a comprehensive bibliography. It is a pity, however, that the print is so small.

I thought several sections were particularly useful, namely a tabulation of drugs commonly used in accident and emergency work, with their doses for both adults and children; a guide to which antibiotic to use in situations such as some head injuries, wounds, and abscesses, and when to use them; and the management of poisoning, particularly from corrosives and volatile hydrocarbons, with a guide on overcoming difficulties with more obscure poisoning.

Some of the opinions and guidance offered are "heterodox and sometimes frankly contentious in the hope that they stimulate radical rethinking of current practice". The treatment of all degrees of burns, when they first present, with 'Terra-cortril' spray may do just this, as may the liberal use of intramuscular antibiotics. The use of magnesium sulphate paste was notable for its absence, the treatment of abscesses being incision and drainage usually combined with systemic antibiotics. The author also condemns the use of antibiotic sprays in the management of wounds "as they fill the air with allergenic dust, and the department with multiresistant bacteria."

I found this a most instructive book and think it a necessary addition to any accident and emergency department for both medical and nursing staff. I rather doubt if general practitioners who do small amounts of this kind of work will find it of such great value, but I would strongly recommend it to all trainees in general practice.

C. O'CONNELL

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF: A CONSUMER'S GUIDE TO MEDICAL CARE

Donald M. Vickery
& James F. Fries

Addison-Wesley
Reading, Massachusetts

269 pages. Price \$5.95

It would be easy to approach this book with prejudice. The glossy cover, the concept of do-it-yourself medicine, expressions such as 'shot' for 'injection' and 'office' for 'surgery'—all these will be off-putting to the hardened NHS patient or doctor. He may shudder at the mention of computers in the first paragraph and wince when he hears that

family doctors are the quarterbacks of the medical system. But this is superficial criticism because the book is just what it sets out to be—a very good guide to medical care for the ordinary patient.

The main section contains page-long descriptions of 68 common conditions or problems with suggestions for home treatment and notes of what to expect if a visit to the doctor is needed. On each opposite page is a simple chart showing the development and possible complications of the illness and the steps that should be taken. For example, if you were to look up chickenpox you would find that home treatment or advice on the telephone is usually adequate unless there is lethargy, convulsions, or a stiff neck, or the lesions appear seriously infected.

With few exceptions the advice is sound, easy to understand and easily accessible. Common sense abounds and there is little dramatization, but quite a lot of wit. This is most noticeable in the opening section, which gives advice on medical care in general. The authors scorn the myth of the annual check-up but believe that blood pressure readings and cervical smears are useful. The patient can do much more for his own health than any doctor but should seek advice promptly if he is really worried. He should shun multiple investigations and expensive treatment without adequate listening or examination from his doctor. These words of wisdom come, not from the Royal College of General Practitioners, but from two doctors in California.

Is this the book on lay medicine we have been looking for? With quite a lot of editing (for quarterback read scrum half) it could be!

C. P. ELLIOTT-BINNS

SCOTTISH DRINKING HABITS

Susan E. Dight

HMSO
London (1976)

315 pages. Price £10.50

Traditionally Scotland has a higher incidence of alcohol abuse than England and Wales. The Scottish Home and Health Department as part of its programme of health education aimed at reducing this problem commissioned a survey into drinking habits and attitudes towards drinking. A representative sample of almost 2,500 people living in Scotland was interviewed in 1972 and the results are now published.

The first part of this extensive report is concerned with drinking habits and there are chapters on the prevalence of alcoholic drinking in Scotland, the

social and demographic background of regular drinkers, parental drinking habits, origin and development of drinking behaviour, and a detailed analysis of alcohol consumption in the week prior to the administration of the questionnaire.

The second part of the report is concerned with attitudes towards drinking and enquiries into people's perception of their own drinking, whether heavy or light, their motivation for drinking, their general attitudes towards drinking, drunkenness and alcoholism, their attitudes towards drinking and health, their experience of public drunkenness and attitudes towards its control, and their knowledge and experience of alcoholics. The report concludes with an analysis of the characteristics of groups with a high prevalence of heavy drinking. This last group contains six per cent of the total adult population but 15 per cent of those aged 17 to 30 in the manual classes. As this group is easy to identify it is suggested that health education should be primarily directed towards such people.

The survey found that the best single indicator of heavy drinking was heavy smoking.

A considerable amount of effort has gone into the administration of the questionnaire and the analysis of the results, which are clearly presented. However, the extent of the report (and the expense) will probably mean that it is likely to be bought only by university departments or medical libraries.

The book contains a nine-page summary which might be of wider interest if published separately.

D. G. GARVIE

MODERN DRUG TREATMENT IN TUBERCULOSIS (5th EDITION)

J. D. Ross & N. W. Horne

*The Chest, Heart and Stroke
Association, London (1976)*

124 pages. Price £1.80

The fact that this little red book has reached its fifth edition is surely evidence that it fulfils a need for the specialist in tuberculosis for whom it is written. What though does it offer the general practitioner? On the whole family doctors are unlikely to have more than half a dozen tuberculosis patients under drug treatment at any one time, and therefore will have little opportunity to acquire a good working knowledge of the drugs involved. There is a natural tendency to leave the intricacies of drug combinations, doses and side-effects to the consultant clinic from

which the drugs were originally prescribed.

Dr Ross and Dr Horne aim to provide a detailed knowledge of the antituberculosis drugs, including their proper use in combination. They wisely start with a chapter on bacteriology with a discussion of drug resistance and sensitivity tests. The first-line drugs, which now include ethambutol, rifampicin and thiacetazone are then described. Further chapters deal with hypersensitivity reactions, the reserve drugs and the place of corticosteroids.

The tone of the book is practical rather than theoretical. There is a useful index. Only four recommendations for further reading are made, which I found a disappointment.

The target readership is presumably those doctors in chest clinics who are daily concerned with the drug treatment of tuberculosis, but the book will also be useful for doctors in training grades and doctors overseas where tuberculosis is a major health problem. I cannot see it acquiring a place on the bookshelf of every family doctor although it will be a useful addition to the libraries of large health centres and district hospitals.

TOM KENNEDY

TODAY'S TREATMENT

*British Medical Association,
London (1976)*

411 pages. Price £4
(including postage).

The ever increasing number of textbooks on current medical treatment presents the average clinician with an increasing problem of choice. The changing scene of British prescribing habits often means that many textbooks are out of date by the time they are published. It was therefore very interesting to review this book, based on articles published in the *British Medical Journal* in 1974 and 1975.

This first volume covers many subjects related to blood and neoplastic diseases, psychological medicine and diseases of the nervous system. The various chapters are by different authors most of whom have had wide experience in medical publishing. The subjects covered are wide and varied although by no means exhaustive. However, they deal in some detail with many common and current problems. The book is nicely presented in paperback and the paper and printing is of a high quality.

In view of the overabundance of books reviewed for general practice, I felt it was important to be as objective as possible about this first volume of *Today's Treatment*. It says a great