

## COUNSELLING IN THE GENERAL PRACTICE SETTING

Danuta and Stefan W. Waydenfeld

Published privately (1979)

25 pages, plus appendices

## MARRIAGE MATTERS

*A Consultative Document by the Working Party on Marriage Guidance*

HMSO (1979)

146 pages. Price £3.25

At a time when marriage has been "never more popular, never more risky", it is perhaps appropriate for family doctors to express an interest in and document results of studies concerned with marriage. The two publications listed above both merit review.

The first report presents the results of a two-year study of counselling in general practice premises in nine practices in North London. Nine counsellors and 35 general practitioners, with a combined practice population of 79,500 patients, co-operated. The report discusses various aspects of surgery counselling and makes comparisons with counselling in the more customary setting of the marriage guidance centre. It also lists the advantages and disadvantages of surgery counselling, both from the doctor's and patient's points of view. A short bibliography is included.

The report comes out strongly in favour of the inclusion of counsellors in the primary care team in the practices concerned. Problems about role definition and methods of working were quickly overcome. The report gives demographic and other details about the 99 patients entered into the study, listing reasons for referral and patients' responses to this move.

The results of counselling are notoriously difficult to assess, but evidence is adduced to suggest that, during six months after counselling had stopped, attendance figures were significantly reduced and there was a subjective impression among the doctors that their ability to deal with family problems had been increased beyond the mere prescription of psychotropic drugs or placebo. The authors adduce some evidence to suggest that a significant reduction in prescriptions for psychotropic and other drugs in fact occurred following the counselling.

This report examines some aspects of communications, and it is clear that there are still ethical problems to be overcome. (The problem of confidentiality of medical notes led to one group practice denying the counsellor access to

files and so to the exclusion of that practice from the study.)

While it is easy to dismiss some of the findings of the report on the grounds of inadequate numbers and the 'softness' of the data, there is enough here to encourage interested general practitioners to participate in further studies of a similar nature to substantiate or refute some of the claims made in this helpful and important document. Those interested may like to contact the marriage counsellor mainly responsible for the study: Mrs P. Gilks, Barnet, Haringey & Hertsmerre Marriage Guidance Council, 5 Woodhouse Road, Tally Ho Corner, Finchley, London N12 9EN.

The second report is a consultative document by a working party on marriage guidance set up by the Home Office in consultation with DHSS. Its purpose is not so much to make detailed proposals but "rather to indicate a new direction which the agencies can follow through in detail".

The report begins by tracing the history of divorce law in modern times and gives an account of the development of the main agencies working in the field. This is followed by a chapter on marriage and the family to provide a suitable background. Chapter 3 outlines the numerous sources of help available and makes the point that only a small proportion of people with marital problems consult specific marital agencies. This is followed by a discussion on the functioning of the various agencies and an examination of the opportunities for development within some of the main agencies. There is a chapter devoted to the provision of help for sexual problems, and the inadequacy of various arrangements for dealing with these problems is highlighted. This leads to a section in which education and training are specifically discussed, both in relation to the professional counsellor and to others involved by the nature of their caring work in the community. A further section deals with miscellaneous issues such as conciliation in connection with court proceedings, education about marriage, and violence in marriage. This leads to a discussion on research, in which five topics are selected for special mention, including case studies and epidemiological research. The final chapter proposes new administrative arrangements and calls for reallocation of responsibility for co-ordinating government action to be invested with a particular Minister of the Crown.

The working party also recommend the establishment of a small central development unit for marital work. Such a 'ginger group' would be concerned with promoting co-ordination and development of services, experiments in attach-

ments of marriage counsellors, with research and with education. The report includes fairly detailed submissions from interested bodies. The views of the Royal College of General Practitioners were considered important enough to be reproduced in full.

This publication could be read with profit by all doctors professing to have an interest in the family dimension of care. It should be included in the bookshelves of postgraduate centres.

J. D. E. KNOX

## MEDICAL SOCIOLOGY IN BRITAIN 3rd EDITION

*A Register of Research and Teaching*

Sara Arber

*Medical Sociology Group of the British Sociological Association Surrey (1978)*

384 pages. Price £2.50

The relationship between medical sociology and general practice seems to be increasing and strengthening. This register is a book of reference indicating most of the leading workers in medical sociology and the addresses at which they can be found.

Group six contains a list of general practitioner-based studies and the book also summarizes several of the courses available at the Institutes of Medical Sociology in the British Isles.

D. J. PEREIRA GRAY

## HEALTH IS FOR PEOPLE

Michael Wilson

*Darton, Longman, and Todd Ltd London (1975)*

127 pages. Price £1.95

What is health? Is it more than the mere absence of disease? Michael Wilson argues that health is something positive, an adventure, a correct relationship between man and his environment. "Health is a concept like truth which cannot be defined. To define it is to kill it." If this sounds like something out of a sermon, readers will not be surprised to learn that the author is qualified both in medicine and theology.

Wilson's journey starts along the well-trodden road of modern general practice—patient-centred medicine, the importance of social and psychological disease, and the inadequacies of our undergraduate education. Health, he