

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 & Hertsmer 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

continues, involves more than 'hygiene'—which is the product of the present National Health Service—but also "education, participation, joy, acceptance, friendship . . ."

I found this book, which is short and easy to read (no long sociological words!) challenging and thought provoking. I thoroughly recommend it to any member of the primary *health* care team. Trainees in particular may find that it extends their perspectives of general practice.

ROGER PEPIATT

INTERPRETING THE ELECTROCARDIOGRAM

James S. Fleming

Update Publications Ltd
London (1979)

136 pages (A4 format). Price £6.75

The recently published report of the new charter working group (1979) suggests an extended range of item-of-service payments, including payment for electrocardiograms, and the British Medical Association has recommended financial aid for general practitioners wishing to buy ECG machines. This represents an added incentive for doctors to record their own ECGs, although the number of practices with their own machines is increasing anyway. There remains the problem of interpretation of the tracing—a skill which is not often learnt by potential general practitioners while they are housemen (apart from basic abnormalities). Vocational trainees may not necessarily gain extra experience either.

There is, therefore, a place for a book entitled *ECGs for Beginners*, but its appeal might be limited. Dr Fleming has set out to explain the ECG in detail, without confusing the reader. Basic principles are laid down, and each part of the ECG complex is described individually. There follows an explanation of changes in the ECG due to disease or drugs, and the text is well illustrated with clear diagrams.

At the end of each chapter is a summary of main points and a selection of ECG tracings for interpretation, which illustrate the points mentioned in the chapter.

The text is concise and factual, but sometimes leaves the reader wanting more explanation—in the chapter on axis deviation, for example. The chapters on arrhythmias, however, are excellent. The author appears to assume different levels of knowledge possessed by the reader at different times, but a practice looking for a basic text on

ECGs would find Dr Fleming's book extremely rewarding.

RUSSELL STEELE

FOETUS INTO MAN

J. M. Tanner

Open Books Publishing Ltd
London (1978)

250 pages. Price £4.50

The ability to reduce complicated processes to simple language is much to be admired, and with the modern tendency for large, multi-author textbooks, it is a pleasure (and also a relief!) to have an extensive subject described succinctly by a recognized expert.

Professor Tanner's enviable style provides the reader with clear explanations of the processes of physical growth from conception to maturity, and despite the fact that the 12 chapters amount to only 220 pages, the theme of accurate scientific measurement remains throughout. The scene is simply set, and by use of simple analogies, cellular function is reduced to a level that does not bemuse the reader. For the general practitioner the chapters on puberty and problems of early and late maturers are particularly useful and provide authoritative advice on how to assess children's growth and development. The endocrinology of growth and growth and development of the brain are covered in a mere 30 pages, yet provide all the essential information on these complicated subjects. The concluding chapters deal with the use of growth charts and give valuable advice on predictions of eventual adult height.

Of particular importance to all doctors and nurses working with children is the simple description of accurate methods of measuring height and weight. Although the writer hints that weight has come to have a disproportionate importance to many people, he makes no suggestions about limiting the amount of ritual weighing performed in well baby clinics.

My only criticism was of the tendency to refer the reader to other parts of the book, but this is probably inevitable when discussing a subject where so many different parts and functions of the body are involved. I got bogged down in some of the intricacies of measurement of decimal age but this may have been a reflection of my own mathematical inadequacy.

Professor Tanner's book will interest all general practitioners who have a special interest in children. They will find it to be easily handled and readily shared with nursing colleagues.

D. J. G. BAIN

LONDON PRIDE—THE STORY OF A VOLUNTARY HOSPITAL

A. E. Clark-Kennedy

Hutchinson Benthall Ltd
London (1979)

254 pages. Price £3.50

If my arithmetic is right, there can be few doctors under the age of 50 who ever studied or worked in a voluntary hospital. To those of us who did, this elegant history of the London Hospital, from its foundation at the Feathers Tavern in Cheapside in 1740 to its takeover by the state in 1948, is a delightful trip into nostalgia. To our younger colleagues the journey will be so strange as to seem almost archaeological, but posterity demands that such a history should have been written so that we may judge what was gained—and what lost—on 5 July 1948.

The author naturally writes of his own hospital, of which he was Dean of the Medical School, but the pattern was the same for all the voluntary hospitals—only the lore, the legend, and the family traditions were different.

Dr Clark-Kennedy's biography of his *alma mater* is as unbiased as filial piety could permit. It is also detailed, meticulously researched, and contains many pictures and photographs of domestic historical interest, and for these reasons must obviously attract greater attention from 'old Londoners' than from those who owe allegiance elsewhere; but with this well written book we now have coverage of that long period from the dissolution of the monasteries to the 'appointed day' in 1948—a long and honourable stint in which medical *caritas* flowered as it is unlikely ever to flower again.

JOHN MILES

TODAY'S TREATMENT/3

British Medical Journal

British Medical Association
London (1979)

294 pages. Price £5.50

The third volume in the series *Today's Treatment* consists, like its predecessors, of articles originally published in the *British Medical Journal* covering diseases of the respiratory system, diseases of the urinary system, and the use of antibiotics.

The first section covers the main topics in respiratory disease but in an uneven manner. There is a great