
NEW BOOKS

THE HEALTH OF CHILDREN. A REVIEW OF RESEARCH ON THE PLACE OF HEALTH IN CYCLES OF DISADVANTAGE

Mildred Blaxter

Heinemann Educational Books
London (1981)

272 pages. Price £14.95

General practitioners are well aware that many families always seem to have more than their fair share of problems. The extent and cause of such cycles of disadvantage pose questions for planners and providers of care alike. This led the DHSS to commission, through the Social Sciences Research Council, a series of empirical studies and literature reviews under the general heading 'Studies in Deprivation and Disadvantage'.

Mildred Blaxter's review is the third in the series. In her search for evidence of a cycle of disadvantage in health she has done a tremendous service in documenting evidence from distant corners of a fragmented field on socially associated differences in the health status of children. From large population surveys to small descriptive studies, from hereditary factors, through the birth process to the transition to adulthood, she gives a bird's eye view of what is known of the interaction of social and environmental factors with health status, and she spotlights the deficiencies in our knowledge.

However, covering 800 references in a little over 200 pages, it is not surprising that sometimes there is too little critical appraisal of the value of individual studies. This is compounded by poor statistical information, which makes it difficult to judge the meaning of phrases like "strong association" or the significance of trends shown in tables.

Despite this, the book remains an excellent source-book for trainers and should stimulate researchers in the field, amongst whom general practitioners could figure prominently. The existence of social differences in health status is now well documented, but this itself is no explanation. The author reminds us that "those who are castigated by general practitioners for being over-demanding appear to have much the same characteristics as those whose children remain unimmunized or die from preventable cot-deaths". Therein lies a

challenge to a more positive and enquiring approach.

C. R. WHITEHOUSE
*Lecturer in general practice
Manchester*

PROBLEMS IN CARDIOLOGY

C. F. P. Wharton

MTP Press
Lancaster (1981)

158 pages. Price £7.95

This is one of a series of books written by district hospital specialists for general practitioners. Apparently the whole series follows the same plan: "written from experience" and therefore unreferenced. This one consists of slightly extended notes on all the common cardiological topics. There is no serious discussion of any of the main problem areas for general practitioners: for example, treatment (or non-treatment) of hypertension in the elderly, home versus hospital treatment for myocardial infarction, or of how to implement rational policies on coronary bypass surgery or pacemakers. These subjects are each dealt with in one paragraph, without any review of evidence. The material on drug treatment for hypertension is so sketchy that it is difficult to conceive of any audience that could make use of it.

I do not believe that general practitioners who buy books, or trainers and trainees who use them, can any longer be treated like children. The fault lies not so much with the author as the series editors. Referencing is an absolutely necessary discipline to any author, who is otherwise encouraged to write off the top of his head. No amount of personal experience can possibly justify this antiquated system, and publishers should not be encouraged by the buying public to retreat to it.

JULIAN TUDOR HART
*General practitioner
Glyncorrwg*

THE PRACTICE OF COMMUNITY ORIENTED PRIMARY HEALTH CARE

S. L. Kark

Prentice Hall
Hemel Hempstead (1981)
253 pages. Price £8.80

The author argues strongly in favour of community-based primary care charac-

terized by a team approach to the health problems of small, defined communities. He goes on to develop the concept of community diagnosis in which a doctor skilled in epidemiological methods identifies the special problems of a particular community, and indicates the type of information necessary to make this diagnosis. He develops his concept of the health care team in terms of the 'nuclear team' consisting of doctors, nurses and social workers, and the 'supporting team' which includes community physician, biostatistician, health educator and nutritionist, to mention but a few members.

The role of the team is illustrated in relation to maternity, child health and growth and development of the young, and there is a chapter describing a preventive programme aimed particularly at the problems produced by arteriosclerosis.

The concept is justified by descriptions of a community orientated health centre in Jerusalem and the development of a community health programme in rural Polela in South Africa. Not surprisingly, the latter starting from scratch produces major improvements in health indices.

In the United Kingdom we have for a long time accepted that the health care team providing for the needs of a defined community is the ideal way of delivering primary care. What is perhaps surprising is that we have failed to take advantage of the epidemiological opportunities of this system in making community diagnoses. This book shows the way in which we may take this important step forward so that we can plan the health care we provide for our registered populations in terms of their needs. This is particularly relevant to those working in inner-city general practice. There is no doubt that this book can be read with profit by trainees, established general practitioners and community physicians.

DAVID MORRELL
*Professor of general practice
London*

New editions

Accidents and Emergencies. A Practical Handbook for Personal Use. Hardy, R. H. (1981). 3rd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 176 pages. Price £5.50.

Essentials of Geriatric Medicine. Adams, George F. (1981). 2nd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 146 pages. Price £4.95.