

FAMILY PLANNING, STERILISATION AND ABORTION SERVICES

Isobel Allen

Policy Studies Institute
London (1981)

130 pages. Price £4.40

Many changes have occurred in the general practice family planning service since Cartwright and Waite published their critical study in this journal in 1972, particularly following the introduction of free family planning. It is therefore appropriate that, 10 years on, there should be a new look at the community family planning services.

Over 95 per cent of general practitioners now provide free family planning advice. A sample of the care which they provide is contrasted in Allen's study with that provided by local health authority clinics. The comparison is based on interviews with patients and health professionals in two area health authorities during 1977 and 1978.

Abortion services continue to cause controversy and a number of family doctors may disagree with the report's pro-abortion viewpoint. Nevertheless, all doctors must view with concern the author's implication that some general practitioners use pregnancy testing as a means to delay requests for abortion beyond 12 weeks' gestation. The variation in availability of sterilization in the two study areas seems to reflect the national picture. Certainly, the continued high level of public interest in sterilization supports the study's recommendation that there should be an increase in NHS resources for sterilization and vasectomy.

There appears to be a high level of consumer satisfaction with the local general practitioner family planning service. In the two areas studied, twice as many women were attending general practitioners for advice than were attending local authority clinics and almost 80 per cent of these users were satisfied with the quality of care they received.

However, the general practice reader is warned against complacency. Disquiet over the varying standards of service, expressed by both consumers and other interested professionals, the high esteem in which family planning clinics are held and the reluctance of many family doctors to be more than 'pill prescribers' results in a powerful call to retain local clinics.

Important changes in clinical practice have occurred since 1978. An increasing number of family doctors now fit intra-uterine devices. Many vocational trainees and principals in practice have attended family planning training

courses and are able to provide a more comprehensive service. Disappointingly, the author's conviction that abortion rates should fall, once effective services exist, has been proved wrong.

These trends do not detract from the importance of the report, for it is the only comparative study of general practice and community clinic services to have been carried out since free family planning was introduced. This study is valuable to all who have an interest in improving standards of family planning care.

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LET'S TALK ABOUT ME

Anthony Clare and Sally Thompson

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253 pages. Price £4.50

The new psychotherapies and the human potential movement are to Freudian psychoanalysis what the hot dog is to a distinguished German sausage. These methods include treatments and more experiential processes of self-enlightenment for normal people who want to be different. Most involve talk: "The notion that talking can ease psychological pain and personal distress is one of the more distinctive features of the second half of this century." Others reach mind via body with screams, massage, nude groups and other exotic, often erotic, protocols.

A common feature is revered gurus or leaders: a creed based on a particular experience or person—the key case. Other features are a glaring lack of supportive evidence, experimental or logical, and a moneyed following. All flourish in America; many have a slick, bureaucratic, business base. Some originated in the USA, others were imported from the East. Some, like Insight, have spread to Europe.

Esalen, gestalt, Rolfing, transactional analysis, sex therapy, holism (called general practice in Britain), primal scream, psychodrama, encounter groups, est, exegesis and innovative orthodox psychotherapy—each is examined with objectivity and scholarship, is investigated on location and, where possible, through personal interviews with the gurus, and receives reasoned, wry comment.

The authors' wit and eclecticism shine through. Their medium is their message: blinkered thought and rigid conviction which fails to draw on all evidence and options inhibits these new psychotherapies no less than traditional European psychiatry. Where do they fit: medicine,

business, recreation, religion? "We feel", conclude the authors, "that the announced agenda of psychotherapy, with its heavily medical, secular and pseudoscientific flavour, insufficiently reflects its frankly religious undertones. . . . In the fifty years since his creation by Freud, the 'secular pastoral worker' has worn the clothes of the man of medicine while actually engaging in the work of a man of God in a godless society."

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NEW EDITIONS

THE MEDICAL SECRETARY'S AND RECEPTIONIST'S HANDBOOK. 4TH EDITION

V. W. M. Drury
Baillière Tindall
London (1981)

295 pages. Price £5.75

For many medical secretaries and receptionists learning the job is a haphazard, painful and inefficient process called "picking it up as you go along". Learning this way is clearly contrary to the best interests of patients, doctors and staff alike. Fortunately, progress is being made. Examined diploma courses of the Association of Medical Secretaries, Practice Administrators and Receptionists provide high-quality training; short courses and study days are widely available and in great demand.

Professor Drury bases his excellent handbook on the syllabus of AM-SPAR's diploma course. It covers comprehensively every aspect of the work of the secretary/receptionist. It is packed with practical up-to-date information. The paragraphs on confidentiality should be compulsory reading for all practice staff. The work of the modern primary care team is given a useful historical perspective, with important chapters on the development of the health services.

This very reasonably priced handbook will be of great value to inexperienced and experienced secretary/receptionists alike. Professor Drury is to be congratulated for the production of this important new edition, which should find a place in every practice.

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