GENERAL PRACTICE LITERATURE

NEW BOOKS

DELEGATION IN GENERAL PRACTICE: A STUDY OF DOCTORS AND NURSES

Anne Bowling

Tavistock
London (1981)
195 pages. Price £10.50

At a time when a training programme for treatment room nurses is being considered by a national multidisciplinary steering group, it is valuable to have a well-researched account of the issues involved in professional relationships between general practitioners and their nursing colleagues. The author, who comes from a prestigious health care research institute, has devoted two thirds of her book to the history and evolution of the association between general practitioners and nurses and for this purpose takes 'delegation' in all its aspects as the crucial relationship to be studied. The remainder of the book describes her interviews with samples of general practitioners and their attached or employed nurses. The interview extracts are illuminating and show the wide range of opinions held by these professionals about their work and relationships. The historical sections begin with the creation of the NHS. Thus there is no account of an admittedly ill-documented but crucial period of mistrust between the general practitioners and the local authorities, the legacy of which is our present bi-partite form of primary care. In all other respects the author has documented her thesis exhaustively, and wide-ranging name and subject indexes are provided.

The main theme is the validity of 'delegation' (and of its near relative 'substitution') as a strategy for relieving doctors' work-load. This proposition is examined in relation to a range of operational variables including trends in medical (but not nursing) staffing and others which are less tangible.

All in all there seems little evidence that delegation has had much effect on the work-load which some general practitioners complain about, but present trends to smaller lists and fewer consultations should reduce its credibility even further. In fact delegation (in the sense of handing down an unwanted task) implies an unequal relationship at a time when many primary care professionals seem to be favouring the more egalitarian transactions of mutual consultation and referral.

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COMPUTERS AND THE GENERAL PRACTITIONER

A. Malcolm and J. Poyser (eds)

Pergamon Press (for The Royal College of General Practitioners)
Oxford (1982)
126 pages. Price £10+50p postage; available from the RCGP

It is some 18 months since the conference and exhibition on which the collection of papers in this publication is based took place; this is a long time in the computer world. Much has changed since then; the future is now the present, with a tremendous increase in the power and storage capabilities of computer hardware. It is estimated that general practice users now approach four figures; the pioneers have become veterans.

Yet there is still a great deal in this collection which is relevant to today's conditions, perhaps because so much of the discussion centred on future possibilities: David Reid, though not a doctor, in "Future Trends in Silicon Chip Technology" somehow got to grips with a real problem: "the problem is getting information into the files". The other major problems were quite reasonably identified as those attached to introducing the computer into the general practice setting, summarized by Robin While's question, "Can anyone persuade his partners and receptionists that installing a computer is not only tolerable but highly desirable?" His obvious enthusiasm is somewhat tempered by Gareth J. Emrys Jones in "A Cautionary Tale".

This is a collection of thoughtful, forward-looking examinations of problems and possible solutions, of enthusiasm leavened with some practical wisdom—a highly recommended buy.

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THE MRCGP STUDY BOOK

T. A. I. Bouchier Hayes, John Fry, Eric Gambrill, Alistair Moulds, K. Young

Update Books
London (1981)
175 pages. Price £11.50 (hardback), £9.75 (paperback)

Any candidate sitting the MRCGP examination would be foolish not to consult this book, as it gives many examples of the written papers and hints on techniques in different parts of the examination.

The book begins with 120 multiple choice questions with feedback on the answers. This is followed by four modified essay questions, each provided with model answers and specimen answers to four traditional essay papers. The authors then describe the two orals, giving examples of questions from each.

There is no doubt that the book will be widely used by those preparing for the examination, as it will no doubt increase their chance of success. However, there are a number of points worth mentioning—the foreword states that the book analyses the exam's objectives and that it is no cookbook of tests and checks, yet objectives are hardly, if ever, mentioned and the book is a cookbook of tests. The multiple choice questions give good tips on the wording of some stems, and the explanation of the answers is useful. They give the breakdown of the distribution of MCQs in the exam. With just over a fifth total medicine and one fifth psychiatry, the examples also emphasize medicine at the expense of psychiatry.

It is a pity in a new book with five authors, three of whom are examiners, that some of the material is not being used for the first time. For example the MEQ on Harry Howes appeared as a Clinical Challenge in *Update* on 15 August 1978 and that of Gillian Frost on 15 December 1978.

The authors give useful tips on spending five minutes planning the essay questions, which is something few do at present. There has been a marked shift in the last year to testing attitudes in the orals but this is not mentioned in the book.

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