

PRIMARY CARE BOOK SHELF

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Reviews by

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THE ELDERLY IN ELEVEN COUNTRIES

E. Heikkinen, W. E. Waters and Z. J. Brzezinski
World Health Organization, Geneva (1983)
231 pages. Price £8.00.

POLICIES FOR A CRISIS

Occasional papers 1

Ivor Batchelor
The Nuffield Provincial Hospitals Trust, Oxford (1984)
50 pages. price £2.00.

THE CARE OF THE ELDERLY IN GENERAL PRACTICE

M. Keith Thompson
Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh (1984)
340 pages. Price £14.95.

GERIATRIC MEDICINE — A PROBLEM ORIENTATED APPROACH

R. C. Hamdy
Ballière Tindall, London (1984)
246 pages. Price £9.95

AGEING — THE FACTS

Nicholas Coni, William Davison and Stephen Webster
Oxford University Press (1984)
205 pages. Price £6.95.

DOMICILIARY SERVICES FOR THE ELDERLY

Liam Clarke
Croom Helm, London (1984)
189 pages. Price £13.95.

The population of Europe is ageing at an unprecedented rate. Predictions of a 35 per cent increase in the number of people aged over 60 years by the year 2000 are widely accepted and this increase will be much steeper in the 80-plus years age group. The very elderly tend to become highly dependent so it is appropriate for readers of the *Journal* to consider recent texts which look at the problems caused by this rising number of senior citizens.

The elderly in eleven countries is the first report of a sociomedical survey of member states in the European region of the World Health Organization (WHO). All member states were invited to conduct standardized interview surveys in a region which they deemed to be reasonably representative of the whole country and a sample of people aged over 60 years was visited at home. Eleven countries accepted and 15 centres were chosen from 10 countries. The report is packed with tables and graphs which depict a huge range of demographic, health and social statistics. Many of the preliminary conclusions are necessarily trite in this first report of cross-sectional data, and academics will question whether the exceptionally good response rates (90–100 per cent) in rural Greece and several communist countries are too good to be true but, overall, a lot of interesting comparative baselines will now be available for further analyses.

The editors are careful to avoid provocative comparisons between countries, but the data on education, attitudes to health, experience of symptoms, ability to perform household duties, common diseases or use of services are tabulated for readers to use and so the study will provoke interesting comments from those who actually look at tables and not just depend on authors' interpretations.

One example of editorial interpretation which could be challenged is the comment, 'extended families are very rare in most industrialized areas' (p.76); yet Figure 8 shows that about 35 per cent of the elderly are living with their children, with a range of 0 to over 90 per cent in different countries. The diversity in the values is more fascinating than the means, a phenomenon which also applies to many other pieces of information in this report. Despite methodological difficulties this is a book which academic

departments and research units concerned with the elderly and the planning of their services should have in their libraries.

Policies for a crisis, the essay by Sir Ivor Batchelor for Nuffield Provincial Hospitals Trust, is a personal view of the rising number of old people in our society. The author has ranged beyond his field of expertise and many of the expressed ideas are not fully referenced. The themes which emerge from the essay are: (1) that as a speciality geriatrics is basically doing a good job, but it must not expand further until the quality of recruits has improved; (2) that general practice needs a shake-up; (3) that while nurses are due more power and influence they must not over-professionalize their roles; (4) that private and public nursing homes for the elderly must multiply and that many community hospitals should be converted to nursing homes; (5) that responsibility for care of the aged should be at health district level and that the recommendations of community health councils should be heeded.

Those who have first-hand experience of work in general practice and in community nursing will find in the first sections of the book a quite sensible weighing up of evidence and in the later sections, some ill-formed generalizations. The paucity of evidence and the surfeit of prejudice in the chapter on general practice does not do credit to the author or to his sponsors, but the development of ideas towards more nursing homes for the elderly is logical, as is the recognition of those who do so much to keep the elderly independent in their own homes — home helps, auxiliary nurses and district nurses.

Readers of the *Journal* may be disappointed at the way in which most of the principles of primary health care are either ignored or misconstrued in this essay. This is perhaps inevitable when a specialist writes on a discipline about which he is ill-informed and unsympathetic. Batchelor has not yet grasped the select and privileged position that specialists have vis-à-vis the general practitioners around them.

The fact that there is some truth in many of the assertions increases the unfortunate impact of this work. This essay exemplifies the lack of knowledge the specialist has about modern primary health care. He uses the language of decentralized decision making without any understanding of its implications thus perpetuating the 'Moran type' of hierarchical thinking, which is so out-moded. And, perhaps because they were trained by the specialists, many who work in the community have not yet comprehended that progress towards a primary health care system which is centred more on the individual or family and which is not hierarchical, is developing rapidly in many parts of the world including the United Kingdom. Thoughtful readers of this essay will realize that the author has unfortunately allowed the worst aspects of his experience to dominate.

The care of the elderly in general practice by Keith Thompson is a most refreshing book to read because it

is written in a style which reflects the author's compassion and realism about the problems generated by our ageing population. He draws an interesting parallel between geriatric medicine and modern general practice as emerging disciplines and depicts how the objectives of both are complementary with regard to the elderly.

The book is in five parts: epidemiology and resources; system based disorders; psychosocial problems; the milieu of care; and self assessment.

Parts I and IV reveal Thompson's good knowledge of his subject. He reviews evidence and poses questions which every practitioner should be able to answer. This is done by interweaving individual clinical care with the epidemiological, physiological and anatomical information which is relevant to primary geriatric medicine. Readers will not get bogged down by academic gerontology, as the author's selective use of survey information and research results is made both relevant and real by his grasp of the realities of work in the community.

Parts II and III are conventional clinical analyses which are brief and apposite accounts of the major problems of our ageing patients/clients. These are useful summaries but readers may find some sections superficial and some useful, according to their own knowledge and skills. I liked the anecdotes and illustrations from home care but they were sometimes reductionist and too dominated by lists.

The questions posed in part IV and the self-assessment multiple choice questions (MCQ) and modified essay questions (MEQ) in part V will render this book a useful working text for trainees and trainers because the items are clearly linked to the text and answers are provided at the end of the book.

Are there any major omissions? Only three were discernible to this reviewer but each will be readily correctable in tutorial groups or subsequent editions: references are predominantly from specialized geriatric sources and there is insufficient coverage of work which relates geriatric medicine to the wider principles of primary health care; the community hospital is not discussed; the danger of a fragmented primary care team is not adequately aired or referenced.

Geriatric medicine — a problem orientated approach written by someone who has had extensive experience in Britain. This very different style of text is presented in a format which is quite popular with general practitioners. D.J.L. comments:

'Of the 22 chapters, several deal specifically with presenting symptoms such as back pain, urinary incontinence, dyspnoea on exertion or headaches; other chapters consider more general problems such as accidental falls, exacerbation of congestive cardiac failure and sleep disorders. There is also a chapter on drug therapy in old age, and another which deals with specific problems relating to geriatric medicine. This latter chapter deals with polypharmacy, multiple pathology, mental and social problems and the atypical presentation of disease.

'I was particularly impressed by the many flow charts

that illustrate the text as they assist logical thought when exploring the various problems. Each chart would make a useful prop for a teaching session.

'This is a practical book which should be made easily available as it is more to be dipped into than read as a straight text. It is a relatively inexpensive paperback which deserves to be on the shelves of many practice libraries — particularly in teaching practices and those where the team approach is particularly well-developed. Postgraduate centres with sufficient funds might well consider the purchase of two copies — one for the geriatric section and the other for the general practice section. The era of the elderly patient is with us and their numbers grow every day. Good input into vocational training and continuing education is essential and this book will certainly make a contribution.'

Ageing — the facts is a book by three Cambridge specialists in geriatric medicine, R.J.H. reports:

'It is concise, informative, easy to read, and presents an optimistic view of what is sometimes regarded as a rather depressing and perturbing subject. The preface states that "the theme of this book is that a mature society is fortunate in having a relatively high proportion of elderly citizens". Some space is devoted to arguments that would support this viewpoint, but in general the evidence is implicit, rather than clearly stated, and the optimistic outlook of the book does occasionally get in the way of stating or tackling the great problems. The aged are presented as a group of people of infinite variability — paradoxically the only real truth about them is contained in the maxim "one should always avoid generalities."

'The text begins with a brief account of the demography of ageing that is both global and national. "Deprivation" and "loss" are the key words, and the suggested means of alleviating these disadvantages by anticipation and adaptation recur throughout this section. There follows an account of relevant health and social service provisions, the physiology and psychology of ageing and a chapter on "Retirement — the age of opportunity." The bulk of the remainder of the book (about 90 pages) deals superficially with the various aspects of health failure in old age, which is considered systematically and consists essentially of a concise standard text on geriatric medicine. After a chapter on death and bereavement we have a "Glimpse of the future." This is a resumé of the merits of preventive medicine and a projection of the future problems, which I felt to be understated.

'The authors address this book to those aged over 60 years, to those who care for them or those who relish the prospect of being old. It is readable and informative but in content it falls between two stools, being neither fully suitable for professionals nor fully suitable for lay people. Ageing is not a favourite area for contemplation and old age is a prospect that most people accept quietly or

deny, so I doubt whether the assertion "we are fortunate in being able to anticipate living into old age" has any meaning for ordinary people. The ultimate realities of life — ageing and death — are those we tend not to consider until they are approaching.'

'*Domiciliary services for the elderly*', reports C.J.O., 'was written as an offshoot from doctorate research into the roles of the various domiciliary care services. The author draws on his longstanding experience of practical social work in both professional and voluntary organizations to argue a strong case for complete revision of these services.

'The introductory chapters deal with the historical development of domiciliary services from their foundation in the Poor Laws through to the post-war establishment of the new National Health Service and on into the 1960s, when the whole organization fell into disarray owing to many factors, especially the unexpected growth in the elderly population and the conflict between the agencies who were involved in their welfare. The reorganization of services as recommended by the Seebohm Report is studied in depth. These chapters provide an essential backdrop to the development of services that occurred in the seventies and show where these could have been improved if more foresight had been used.

'The evolution of the services in the seventies, with more emphasis on value-for-money community services and hence increased pressure on personal domiciliary services, is investigated. This theme is further probed when considering the needs for the eighties, and proposals are made that would radically alter the roles of everyone involved in the care of the elderly — home help and domiciliary organizers, community nursing staff and others. In other words, create a more efficient client-orientated system. Examples of pilot schemes encompassing some of these suggestions are discussed. The author next reviews the organization of care in established social services, using France and Sweden as examples, and he describes the development of a relatively new service in Ireland, comparing and contrasting it with the service in Great Britain. He comes down heavily on the side of the Swedish domiciliary services using this as a foundation for the organization of training programmes and the development of an improved career structure for all those involved in home care.

'Finally, Clarke proposes the introduction of local community buildings with all necessary facilities for the elderly. Each area would be used as a base for all those involved in welfare of the elderly and also as a focus for them. Residential care should be the final option.

'In summary, the book is informative, easy to read, well researched and full of quite radical proposals. It gives a clear picture of the history and current state of domiciliary services in the UK, with projections of what they could be like, given the necessary resources and changes in attitude.'