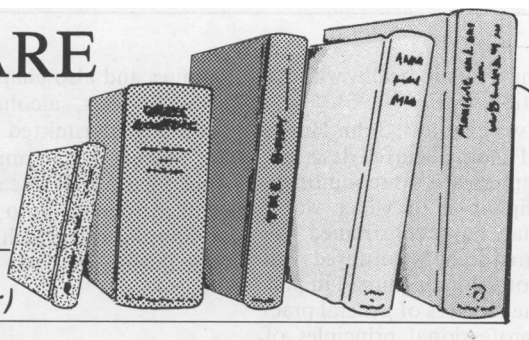


# PRIMARY CARE BOOK SHELF

NIGEL STOTT (Reviews Editor)



J. TUDOR HART

LORNA TAPPER-JONES

M.C. BLOOMFIELD

## HUMAN EXPERIMENTATION: A GUIDED STEP INTO THE UNKNOWN

William A. Silverman

Oxford University Press, Oxford (1985)

204 pages. Price £20.00

## OXFORD TEXTBOOK OF PUBLIC HEALTH Volume 2

Walter W. Holland, Roger Detels and George Knox (Eds)

Oxford University Press, Oxford (1985)

214 pages. Price £25.00

## OXFORD TEXTBOOK OF PUBLIC HEALTH Volume 3

Walter W. Holland, Roger Detels and George Knox (Eds)

Oxford University Press, Oxford (1985)

498 pages. Price £35.00

## PROMOTING HEALTH, A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO HEALTH EDUCATION

Linda Ewles and Ina Simnett

John Wiley and Sons, Chichester (1985)

201 pages. Price £6.95

## HANDBOOK OF FAMILY PLANNING

Nancy Loudon (Ed)

Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh (1985)

334 pages. Price £16.00

## WOMAN'S EXPERIENCE OF SEX

Sheila Kitzinger

Penguin Books, Harmondsworth (1985)

320 pages. Price £5.95

Five years ago William Silverman wrote a classic which should be on the shelf of every teaching practice in the English speaking world, and deserves to be translated into every language — *Retrolental fibroplasia: a modern parable* (New York: Grune and Stratton, 1980). This apparently specialized title restricted the audience for this particular yet universal argument for the humane consequences of apparently ruthless scientific method and against the often tragic results of well-intended guesswork. All who read Silverman's first book will want to buy *Human experimentation: a guided step into the unknown*. It is a discursive, entertaining and original ramble around philosophy, methodology, and to some extent the sociology of the therapeutic trials on which all medical treatment is supposedly based. It is full of quotable teaching material, just right for catching sideways that well-educated, cocksure ignorance which so often impedes the remedial education that trainers and trainees equally require. The references alone make the book a good buy.

That said, however, I was a bit disappointed. Readers of his first book could use his material — very specific in time, space,

and social context — to reach their own conclusions. Yet these will seldom have differed from the conclusions he now leads us to in more didactic fashion. We often learn more from parables than we do from longer and more comprehensive texts, because they are striking, easily memorable anecdotes; weapons we can choose and use by ourselves.

The ambitious goals of this book expose the only weakness of this great medical author: an innocence of social realities that is possible only for a kind and generous man whose experience seems to derive from centres of excellence. He does not seriously attempt to explain why so little clinical practice is actually based on the results of randomized controlled trials, either in Britain or the United States, and he ignores both open and covert market pressures. He does not discuss the immense opportunities for improving practice which are opened up by participation in trials on the mass scale and which are now necessary to obtain significant results for the common causes of sickness and premature death.

Finally, he does not address the most serious challenge of all: the rising wave of well-funded and fashionable obscurantism which is forcing liberal science into humiliating retreat, and which could make large-scale medical research impossible if it is allowed to proceed unchecked. Nevertheless, none who dare tackle these newer questions will do it well without Silverman.

J.T.H.

The *Oxford textbook of public health* is published in four well-presented volumes. The first volume, which provides a view of the scope of public health, was reviewed in these columns in June 1985. *Volume 2* deals with the processes of health promotion and new attitudes which are arising as more people grasp the significance of trying to achieve 'health for all by the year 2000'. The 'new' public health is becoming concerned with quality of care, access to care, new environmental hazards and people's lifestyles; thus it is on course to embrace primary health care, the health promotion movement and the organization of health services.

Each volume is in multi-author format. *Volume 2* commences with chapters on the control of the physical environment, the social environment, the infectious environment and the population. Gordon McLachlan's chapter on 'Public health at the crossroads' finds services facing stringent economies and indicates a need for first-class information systems to ensure effective use of resources. Yet in typical McLachlan style he also reminds the information system enthusiast that the interaction of so many different interests within the National Health Service is unlikely to be reformed into a well-regulated and integrated organization, smoothly responsive to central direction. 'It is doubtful if any but a loose structure and organization could embrace the enormous complexity of health services operating at so many management levels and within so many constraints.'

He perceives the new public health as providing information intelligence on which several authorities can draw but separates it from management structure. Not everyone will share this perspective but his analysis is thought-provoking because it

creates an intellectual niche for the new public health without direct responsibility for implementation.

Primary health care is covered in two chapters, John Howie and Mike Porter give a UK view and Timothy Murrell describes developments in Australia. Both chapters are disappointingly parochial and fail to set the discipline in a wider world framework. The editorial policy may have constrained the authors but a general practitioner-centred scene is portrayed with little acknowledgement that other professionals (nurses in particular) are involved and active. All the features of general practice are described yet few of the professional principles of primary health care. Murrell does mention the World Health Organization's Alma-Ata conference in his introduction but a fragmented Australian front-line service is described which is achieving some of its goals despite the difficulties created by political factors.

George Godber provides a realistic appraisal of the complexity of the NHS in his chapter on the provision of specialist services. His concise account of the role of primary care and his use of international comparisons reveal a refreshing breadth of vision.

The chapter on 'Provision for dependency disorders' is also an excellent review of alcohol, tobacco and drug dependencies. Extensive referencing and a systematic approach by authors Louis West and Sidney Cohen result in a most useful section to the book.

The remainder of *Volume 2* consists of five chapters on the organization, training and coordination of USA and UK health services. Each is factual and focusses on structure and staff roles, hence a somewhat fragmented and bureaucratic picture emerges. Nevertheless, these are useful chapters as they reveal the frontiers of public health. In the closing pages of the volume L.B. Hunt and J.H. James bring together some useful thoughts on new problems of coordination of services, leaving Julius Richmond and Milton Kotelchuck (USA) to spell out how in the second public health revolution healthy life-styles will be as important in the twentieth century as infectious disease control was in the nineteenth century.

Thinking people in primary health care will welcome the so-called new public health because it is going to be dependent on community initiatives rather than centralized controls and this will require radical changes in the mind of many professionals who still think in old public health terms.

N.C.H.S.

*Volume 3* of the *Oxford textbook of public health* considers investigative methods in public health. This 500-page academic tome deals with information systems and routine monitoring, application of information to health promotion, epidemiological techniques, social science techniques, field investigation of physical, chemical and biological hazards, and finally research and development of health promotion services. There is an introduction by George Knox to the 31 chapters written by 41 authors.

This book will be a revelation to anyone who is uncertain what public health encompasses: it includes almost everything. Since many of the chapters are highly specialized and written by people who have spent years working in specific fields, *Volume 3* is likely to be consulted as a reference source rather than as a general text. This does not reduce the value of the individual sections but it does call into question the definition of 'public health'.

Primary care physicians will find one kinsman among the authors: David Morrell writes the chapter on research and the delivery of primary care in the United Kingdom. In his concise and thoughtful way he deals with some of the special characteristics of primary care and some aspects of research in this broad and rapidly expanding field. Many of the other authors write about research techniques or systems which are important in primary health care; there are five chapters on epidemiological methods, five chapters on social science tech-

niques and also chapters on such diverse subjects as information systems, alcohol abuse, screening, health promotion, sexually transmitted diseases, iatrogenic disease and viruses.

*Volume 3* is an amazing conglomeration of diverse subjects but each is well researched and written. The fact that they are pulled together into this big book is a manifestation of the ambitious role which leaders in the new public health have cast for themselves: that of overseers to the health services of the world.

N.C.H.S.

*Promoting health — a practical guide to health education* is a refreshing and interesting approach to a subject which is considered by some to be dull. It is written for a variety of professionals interested in health matters and would, therefore, be suitable for all members of the primary care team as they are in an ideal situation to promote health education either locally in their practices or further afield in the community.

The authors — a dietician and a physiologist, both experienced in health education — describe their book as giving an 'active educational experience' which would be suitable for individual readers or groups studying together. The layout of the book is excellent. Each chapter begins with a clear summary and concludes with a brief reference section. The text itself consists of concise information with sub-headings and is interspersed with delightful cartoons, exercises, quizzes, study questions and case studies. There are no 'correct' answers given to the quizzes or exercises since their aim is to stimulate the reader to think, rather than to test factual knowledge. Throughout the text, the health educator is referred to as 'she' and the recipient of health advice as 'he' — an interesting turnabout from the usual doctor-patient stereotypes.

The text is divided into three sections which consider, in detail, the philosophy, planning and practice of health promotion. The first section discusses health education in sociological terms and contains much relevant theory in a palatable form. Part two deals with planning and could be most useful to practitioners who wish to organize their own health education programmes. Excellent flow charts and information on evaluation methods should prove useful for anyone wishing to carry out research into health promotion methods. The concluding section, which deals with the practice of health education, is particularly relevant to the general practitioner. It is written in a very readable form and gives useful tips on the use of non-verbal communication, teaching, giving talks and setting up and working with voluntary organizations and self-help groups. The chapters on working with the mass media and health education materials are particularly relevant to general practitioners engaged in these activities, and will be of general interest to many others.

This book will be a valuable asset to any general practice library and should stimulate lively discussion among all members of the primary care team.

L.T.J.

In the *Handbook of family planning* Nancy Loudon and her team of eminent authors have provided a practical, comprehensive account of family planning methods and services. It is well set out, easily read and excellent as a reference text in practice. The recent controversy regarding the oral contraceptive pill for under 16-year-olds is discussed, as is post-coital contraception and new developments like the vaginal sponge. The opportunities for health screening during the family planning consultation are well outlined. This is a most useful handbook, although in such a rapidly changing field, new editions will be necessary.

M.C.B.