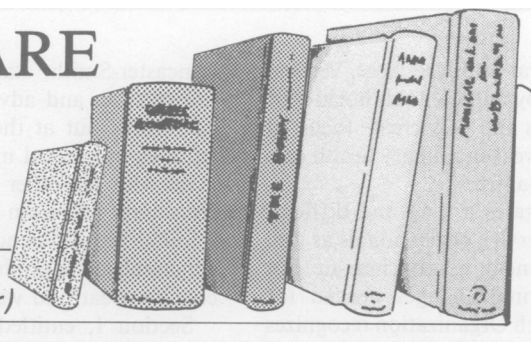


PRIMARY CARE BOOK SHELF

NIGEL STOTT (Reviews Editor)



GORDON LLOYD
RAPHAEL CANTOR
WENDY J. JONES

THE EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES

Family practitioner committees in the 1980s

Judith Allsop and Annabelle May

King Edward's Hospital Fund for London, London (1986)

215 pages. Price £10.95

NATIONAL HEALTH DEVELOPMENT NETWORKS IN SUPPORT OF PRIMARY HEALTH CARE

WHO offset publication no. 94

World Health Organization, Geneva (1986)

49 pages. Price Sw.fr.10.-.

IC — PROCESS — PC

International classification of process in primary care

Prepared by the Classification Committee of WONCA (World Organization of National Colleges, Academies and Academic Associations of General Practitioners/Family Physicians) in collaboration with NAPCRG (North American Primary Care Research Group)

Oxford University Press (1986)

61 pages. Price £8.50

MORBIDITY FIGURES FROM GENERAL PRACTICE

Data from 4 general practices 1978-1982

H.J.M. Van Den Hoogen, F.J.A. Huygen, J.W.G. Schellekens, J.M.

Straat and H.G.M. Van Der Velden (Eds)

Nijmeegs Universitair Huisartsen Instituut, Netherlands (1985)

152 pages

GERIATRICS

Management of common diseases in family practice

A. Martin and E.C. Gambrell

MTP Press, Lancaster (1986)

150 pages. Price £17.50

INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Management of common diseases in family practice

D. Brooks and E.M. Dunbar

MTP Press, Lancaster (1986)

237 pages. Price £19.95

It is almost unbelievable that *The emperor's new clothes* is the first publication which could be regarded as a significant analysis of family practitioner committees in their evolving role. It also reveals a depth of understanding of their difficulties.

Family practitioner committees emerged from their inward-looking and parochial executive councils in 1974. The transition was productively unremarkable initially, but over the next decade their role and function changed with increasing momentum. The momentum was paralleled by an increase in their work but not in their powers. The granting of autonomy in 1985 increased their accountability and responsibilities and they were given developmental guidelines and considerable extra duties, all to be financed by increased efficiency. Regrettably there was not a feasibility study to expose the impracticability of this standpoint.

The book describes the range of work of family practitioner committees, their role, function and influence on the provision of primary care. Many examples of good practice are described such as the City and East London family practitioner committee interfacing with more than one district health authority and local authority, who took giant collaborative steps to uprate medical practice premises to a satisfactory standard.

The authors interviewed administrators from 10 geographically spread family practitioner committees serving different population types, community unit administrators, a community physician and two primary care development workers. Supplementary information was obtained from over half of the remaining 88 family practitioner committees who answered a questionnaire.

The 'ludicrously small' administrative budget of family practitioner committees was unflinchingly criticized as was the untenable traditional hierarchy of what now should be structured management. May and Allsop clearly state the urgent need for management training for all levels of staff and they also highlight the need for training members. The need for change in outdated regulations is made by the endorsement of rule-bending but occasionally there is a slight unsupported bias towards consumerism.

It was encouraging to read of innovation and the implicit enthusiasm of some pro-active family practitioner committees in the face of the ubiquitous frustrations that have always been the lot of the Cinderellas of the NHS. One had to admire their vigour even if one did not always find sympathy with their ideas. On the basis of this book there is arguably a role for an NHS director of primary care.

Having praised and damned, the authors find room in their King's Fund commissioned work to look to the future, a future of proper, useful collaboration towards a primary care service that is bursting to quit its embryonic state.

Besides being humourously and appropriately titled, this really is a superb, readable book. I found it compulsive reading, stimulating, accurate, well-researched and embracing useful references and appendices. Every trainee and every practitioner interested in contributing to the future of primary care should read this book and it must be obligatory homework for all family practitioner committee members and all levels of NHS staff. The facts and ideas contained should convince all of us of the undeniable cause of primary care development. Hopefully some of us should be inspired to further it.

Sadly the authors have starkly portrayed a palpable lack of silver let alone gold in the threadbare garments of the family practitioner committee's new clothes.

G.L.

National health development networks in support of primary health care clearly enunciates the principle that vertical

programmes do not fit easily into local health services. Vertical programmes are usually introduced by impatient authorities or donors who wish to see quick results and they create focussed priority programmes which actually weaken primary health care by competing with it before fading away.

Achieving 'health for all' necessitates a long and difficult process of social change for health service professionals as well as the public as standard management approaches are not producing the social and institutional changes needed for primary health care. The World Health Organization recognizes this and is promoting instead decentralized decision-making so that problems can be solved at the periphery. The network approach permits national policies and principles to be adapted to local needs and conditions. In theory 'bottom up' planning and community development can be married to the need for central control of limited resources. The methods which primary health care uses are simple but are not simple to implement, hence this new, tactful WHO document should be welcomed by all who think about their discipline.

N.C.H.S.

IC — process — PC is a new classification which, in combination with the *International classification of health problems in primary care* describes and measures the process of primary care. Diagnostic, therapeutic and administrative aspects of every encounter can now be coded using a system which has been developed and tested by the WONCA Classification Committee and the North American Primary Care Research Group. General practitioners from several countries were involved and the user is provided with codes for a wide range of diagnostic and therapeutic procedures which provide a classification of the processes of care.

The new book is the penultimate volume in a series of four. The first was a classification of the reasons for an encounter, the second the coding of health problems and diagnoses, and the fourth will be a classification of functional status. Practitioners who are involved in coding practice activity analyses and would like to make international comparisons should find the series useful.

N.C.H.S.

Morbidity figures from general practice is a set of age-sex specific incidence and prevalence figures for diagnoses from four Netherlands general practices over the period 1978-82. The data have been collated by the University of Nijmegen Department of Family Medicine and represent a most useful by-product of continuous morbidity registration.

Anyone who is thinking objectively about what is happening in family medicine will sooner or later recognize the need for comparative data on the work of the general practitioner/family physician. This useful document will be added to my collection of important statistical sources. It will help to answer some questions concerning international differences and pose many more for further research.

N.C.H.S.

Geriatrics is one of the series *Management of common diseases in family practice*. The series editors, Dr J. Fry and Dr M.

Lancaster-Smith, state that the aim 'is to provide practical information and advice on less common, potentially serious conditions but at the same time to take note of the special features of general medical practice.'

As with the other books in the series the co-authors are a consultant physician and a general practitioner and, although I found the differences in style disconcerting, they are to be congratulated in producing a volume packed full of information, concise, clear and well presented.

Section 1, entitled 'The nature of the problem', presents beautifully the effect that caring for the elderly has on the health and social services at present and how the effect will increase over the next decade or two; special factors in the management of disease in the elderly are considered and a plea is made for general practitioners to have a multidisciplinary approach in the organization of care in the elderly.

Section 2 on the symptoms and their differential diagnosis is the weak section of the book as it is really the author's check-list for common symptoms presenting in general practice. One can play a good game by producing one's own check-list and seeing who has the longer list. However, the editors stress that the series aim is not only to present information but also to stimulate thought and enquiry.

Section 3 is by far the largest section. It is entitled 'Specific disease complexes' and has some essential reading for all those interested in the care of the elderly. The two sub-sections that are outstanding contain discussions on hypertension and its management and on the elderly disabled, the latter being sufficiently important and well presented to deserve a special chapter in its own right.

Thus this book should be considered as a 'must' for all doctors interested in better understanding and care of the elderly. It is worthy of being included in any practice library and any potential Diploma of Geriatric Medicine candidate would be well advised to read it.

R.C.

Infectious diseases is another recent addition to the *Management of common diseases in family practice* series. It is a practical guide to the management of patients presenting in practice with infectious disease. The first chapter quantifies the problem with an analysis based on figures from the author's own practice during the year 1982. The chapter also goes on to give useful addresses and advice on the collection and transportation of specimens.

The authors cover such topics as self-care and its role in the management of infectious disease and there is also a well written chapter on immunization. The rest of the book covers a wide and varied range of infections seen in general practice and gives a useful update on the not so common conditions. Of particular interest are the sections on imported infections and foreign travel.

Written in a pleasant and informal style the book is peppered with an original sense of humour. Those new in practice will find much practical advice in this book and 'old hands' will find it interesting reading. Acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) is covered, but only briefly, and unfortunately, the book seems to have gone to press prior to the withdrawal of aspirin for children.

Written for general practitioners, this book links facts with therapeutics and sensible advice. I believe that trainees will find it particularly useful.

W.J.J.