



### PREVENTING MENTAL ILLNESS

Jennifer Newton

*Routledge and Kegan Paul, London (1988)*

275 pages. Price £25.00

In his foreword Colin Murray Parkes hopes that this book 'may deter impatient fools from rushing in with half-baked schemes'. This is salutary advice at a time when preventive medicine is the flavour of the month.

Jennifer Newton makes the case for one professional group having primary responsibility for developing preventive health approaches and identifies general practitioners as having this role in the area of mental illness. She selects key research studies from the substantial literature which have been particularly influential in the development of a framework for preventing mental illness. She uses schizophrenia and depression to illustrate her theme and it is the latter than general practitioners and allied professionals will find most interesting, if only to confirm that the greatest need for action lies in those practices serving the most disadvantaged populations.

Complementing as it does the College's publications on prevention, this is a very good book indeed.

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### TEXTBOOK OF GENERAL MEDICINE AND PRIMARY CARE

John Noble (Ed)

*Little, Brown and Company, Boston (1987)*

2376 pages. Price £79.50

In the preface the editor of this American book writes that 'The clinical presentation and management of illness and medical problems of primary care as it is actually practiced has served as the major focus for this text'. To that end approximately 200 contributors have produced a reference work of nearly 2500 pages.

It is divided into four sections. The first is called 'The primary care patient' and contains a mishmash of topics such as communication, ethics, the law, occupational and environmental health, and decision analysis. The second section, 'Emergencies', ranges from musculoskeletal injuries to radiation exposure and pesticide poisoning. By far the longest is the third section, 'General medicine and primary care', which is subdivided into conventional specialties, for example dermatology, ophthalmology, neurology and so on. The last section, 'Management of special patients', provides an 'integrated holistic approach' to the care of certain categories of patients, for example the adolescent, the retarded, the raped and battered, and the malnourished patient.

While this book can be approached along the traditional lines for a reference text, for indepth reading of a subject of personal interest or for preparing a topic for teaching, it also provides a highly relevant commentary on some of the problems that are facing British general practice today. For example, the chapter entitled 'Periodic health examination of the adult' discusses why the annual comprehensive examination for well people is no longer supported in the United States. Some of the reasons cited for this shift in opinion include the harm that can be done, for example by complications of invasive procedures done in response to false positive screening tests, the misleading impression that good health is assured and the lack of data to support many of the components of the examination. Can we not learn from their experience? It would be ridiculous if our health service were to re-enact the very mistakes the Americans now realize they have made.

Despite the obvious differences in the way in which the provision of medical care is organized we could learn a lot from our transatlantic colleagues.

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### RESHAPING THE NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE

Robert Maxwell (Ed)

*Policy Journals, The Old Vicarage, Newbury, Berkshire (1988)*

199 pages. Price £25.00

Everyone has an opinion about what has been happening recently in the National Health Service, but few of us are well informed. This book is a collection of papers describing the changes which have taken place since the Conservative government took office in 1979. The authors discuss the extent to which such changes have been innovative or merely continuations of existing trends. The introduction of general management and the efforts made in the search for efficiency and value for money, including performance indicators, contracting out, supplies purchasing and estate management are all well covered. The impact of government policies on doctors, nurses and ancillary staff is discussed, together with the varying fortunes of consumer representation. David Taylor argues that family practitioner committees should be strengthened and competition encouraged between primary care providers. However, the basis for these conclusions, unlike those in other chapters, is abstruse.

It is heartening to see emphasis being given to the need for outcome measures and for data to be collected which is suitable for its purpose rather than simply available. Perhaps the need for expertise in data interpretation will be recognized next.

This book is very readable and I doubt there are many who would not learn something of interest from it. My one disap-

pointment was the lack of a bibliography. References would have made this book a starting point rather than an intriguing dead end.

SUE JONES

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**DISABILITY IN THE FAMILY (Video)**

*Duane Bishop and Robert Wrate  
Macmed, Dundee (1987)  
Price £60.00*

This videotape on disability in the family shows edited extracts from an initial family interview with the Williams family. The family consists of David Williams, the father, who has suffered a severe head injury two years previously, and his wife and four children.

The interviewer skilfully moves the interview around the family members, including the father. Viewers could not fail to be impressed with the problems which have befallen this family since the accident.

The tape is organized so that it can be stopped periodically and summaries of the presenting problems are given in order to facilitate discussion. Unfortunately, this makes the tape too long for one viewing session and the repetition and slowly unfolding history becomes boring. However, the family dynamics are excellently revealed and this could make the tape effective teaching material for medical, nursing, or social work students.

M.E. BARKER

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**THE NEW CASE FOR EXERCISE**

*P.H. Fentem, E.J. Bassey and N.B. Turnbull  
Sports Council and Health Education Authority, London (1988)  
40 pages. Price £2.95*

In 1976 the Department of Health and Social Security asked the Sports Council to collate and evaluate the existing evidence on the beneficial effects of exercise on health. In 1978 a report by Professor Fentem and Dr Bassey, *The case for exercise*, highlighted a number of different areas in which exercise had been shown to have beneficial effects upon health. In a superbly researched, updated and revised edition, the team from Nottingham have lucidly and comprehensively made a compelling case for exercise in programmes of health promotion and for mass sports participation. They have assessed more than 3000 international research studies, most of them published during the 10 years since their original statement and *The new case for exercise* lists 241 of the most relevant studies.

Increasingly, general practitioners are accepting the challenge to take an active lead in disease prevention and health promotion. At the same time, society is changing as unemployment and early retirement contribute to greater availability of leisure time and facilities. How should these be used? Are there benefits to be derived, and if there are, is the public, and indeed the profession, yet aware of them?

As a result of the evidence provided in *The new case for exercise*, general practitioners can now offer informed advice, encouraging their patients, relatives and friends to enjoy the benefits of exercise. The report discusses these benefits as being of special importance to the elderly or disabled and those suffering from chronic diseases, such as bronchitis, asthma and heart disease. It also discusses the contribution of exercise to the prevention and treatment of chronic conditions such as obesity, hypertension, diabetes of mature onset and osteoporosis. The

association between increasing levels of physical activity and the reduction in the incidence of coronary heart disease appears to be consistent and graded.

At £2.95, this book represents excellent value for money. Although it can be read at one sitting, its effect could be life saving. Buy it. Read it. Recommend it.

JIM McCracken

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**COMMUNICATING WITH DYING PEOPLE AND THEIR RELATIVES**

*Jean Lugton  
Austen Cornish in association with the Lisa Sainsbury Foundation, London (1988)  
108 pages. Price £6.50*

Caring for dying patients is universally acknowledged to be an extremely challenging task for professional carer and family member alike. Jean Lugton has experienced such situations both as professional nurse and personal friend, and she has drawn on this wealth of practice to bring a unique, informed authority to her writing.

Each of the nine chapters provides a valuable list of important areas to consider and will form a useful starting point for further discussion and reading. Of particular interest are the exercises at the end of each chapter, designed to help readers and their colleagues to understand the relevance of the content to their own situation. The chapter on the needs of staff is particularly important, highlighting as it does such issues as developing realistic expectations and the importance of teamwork.

It is extremely difficult to deal with such a complex topic within the confines of 108 pages and the author has made a laudable attempt to do so. However, some readers will feel frustrated at not being able to share the results of the research work on which some of the more thought provoking statements are based.

ROBIN PUGSLEY

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**URINARY TRACT INFECTION IN CLINICAL AND LABORATORY PRACTICE**

*Rosalind Maskell  
Edward Arnold, London (1988)  
268 pages. Price £25.00*

Dr Maskell is a microbiologist with the Public Health Laboratory Service in Portsmouth. She has written this book for clinicians and laboratory staff. Sadly it is authoritarian rather than authoritative and is out of touch with the clinical world. She states that writing forms should be done by doctors, as delegation to nurses 'results in misuse of the laboratory and is wasteful' and that patients should wash their perineums with soap and water before providing a urine specimen.

The author has done much to publicize her view that lactobacilli are the cause of the urethral syndrome. Her viewpoint has been decisively rebutted by colleagues at the Royal Free Hospital but she accords their careful research a brief sentence. She finds psychological explanations of illness distasteful and unscientific.

This is not an easy book to read and would have benefited from a complete ban on the use of the semi-colon. It falls between two stools by being unsuitable for either general practitioners or laboratory staff.

T.C. O'DOWD

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