PEER REVIEW IN GENERAL PRACTICE
R. Grol, P. Mesker and FG. Schellevis (eds)
Translation by J.W. Krabshuis and K. Williams
Department of General Practice, Nijmegen University, The Netherlands (1988)
230 pages. Price $50.00 Dutch florins or $26.00

While we have talked a great deal about peer review in the UK in recent years, general practitioners in other countries have actually been doing it, as this book shows. It is the collected experiences of a team from the Nijmegen University Department of General Practice who have been running a large scale experiment in peer review since 1982. It is intended as a source of advice for doctors who wish to undertake peer review in small groups, and in this respect is ahead of any similar reports from the UK. It includes perceptive hints on running an audit group successfully and how to negotiate agreed standards that will be adhered to. The consultation is dissected and comprehensive criteria and checklists provided, together with 24 clinical protocols in a detailed but flexible format.

The book achieves its aim of being a guide to peer review in group settings, and can be firmly recommended to anyone running such a group. However, it should be noted that the definitions of criteria and standards are confused, and that there is little discussion of video-recording since audio taping and sitting-in seem to be the preferred Dutch methods for observing consultations.

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A NEW KIND OF DOCTOR
The general practitioner's part in the health of the community
Julian Tudor Hart
362 pages. Price £12.95

Reviewing Dr Tudor Hart's new book is without doubt the most difficult and most important exercise of this kind that I have ever undertaken. Whatever your response to this review I urge you to buy, borrow or steal a copy and read it for yourself.

A new kind of doctor is two things: it is a critique of medicine, particularly medicine in the United Kingdom, which also aspires to offer a solution for present failings. The critique is trenchant, beautifully and arresting written, full of quotable aphorisms and different from previous attempts by others.

The new solution, the 'new kind of doctor', is based upon two major premises. The first is that the case for proactive, anticipatory care, which includes opportunistic screening, is almost self-evidently true. The second is that doctors should be accountable to their patients and that the unit of accountability should be the small community which approximates to an individual or group practice population of patients. It will not escape you that this solution closely relates to a professional lifetime spent in Glyncorrwg and to an overt political conviction. I believe both premises to be unsustainable and dangerous.

There is no attempt in this book to deal with the problems, both practical and ethical, which surround opportunistic screening and other 'proactive' activities. In particular there is little discussion about the problems of false positives and low predictive power except in relation to hypertension. As one might expect there is a lot of sensible discussion about blood pressure although I wonder if somebody who has been encouraged to make 28 recordings of their own blood pressure can be readily reassured that there is no cause for concern.

I fear that the 'new doctor' working in his or her community may become, together with others, the nidus for a new intolerance based upon medicine as a morality. I would rather that the general practitioner of the future retreated into being reactive and responded to patient's requests in a way which was, in Dr Tudor Hart's own words, based on 'measured doubt'. This lays me open to belonging to the liberal critique which Dr Tudor Hart describes as having, 'scholarly backing, humane intentions, appeal to both left and right intellectual radicals without embarrassment to either, and ability to interpret defeat as victory'.

I am suspicious of Utopias of both the left and the right and believe that realism must set more modest goals and that life in Utopia threatens individual freedom.

Although he does not hold a full time university appointment Julian Tudor Hart is the most distinguished of present day academic general practitioners. This book illustrates some aspects of his extraordinary achievement; it is full of treasures. Read it.

JAMES MCCORMICK
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LIVING WITH CHRONIC ILLNESS
The experience of patients and their families
Robert Anderson and Michael Bury (eds)
265 pages. Price £9.95 (paperback), £28.00 (hardback)

The individual, his or her family and the collective experience of chronic illness is the focus of this book. Studies are presented which, through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, clearly describe the wide ranging social effects of chronic illness.
Clearly illustrated is the potentially devastating impact of chronic illness upon families and especially the spouse, an aspect of illness that has frequently been ignored in the past. Also highlighted are the severe constraints that practical needs can have upon both individuals and families, thereby reminding us of the many ways in which illnesses can debilitating. The development of coping strategies is also discussed. The problems and possibilities for improvements in service provision are mentioned but not developed, leaving largely unstated the potential for services to help adjustment.

Although based around a sociological framework the book remains readable to those outside medical sociology. Overall it successfully shifts the emphasis away from the medical towards the personal and wider social aspects of chronic illness. It is an interesting and frequently enlightening book that can be highly recommended to those within the medical profession, particularly for the insight it gives into the social effects of selected chronic illnesses.

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YEAR BOOK OF FAMILY PRACTICE 1988  
587 pages. Price £34.00

On the face of it, this book would make a nice Christmas present. It is about the same size as a box of chocolates although it costs as much as two bottles of malt whisky. It is beautifully produced, has an excellent index and is packed with information, but unfortunately has little to do with family practice. It turns out to be a collection of many hundreds of annotated abstracts of papers dealing mostly with internal medicine, published up to July 1987. The shortest chapter in the book is the one dealing with family problems.

Despite this, it is a browser's paradise; the dedicated after-dinner reader will turn up such gems as a list of 12 indications for empiric amphetamines, a useful review of the evaluation and treatment of smell dysfunction and a cautionary account of black widow spider envenomation.

This is all the more peculiar when the reader discovers, leafing back to the title page, that all the editors head departments of family practice and primary care in the USA. This book cannot be recommended for the practice library, but as a source of stimulation and edification it is likely to compare favourably with other compendia of useless information published for the festive season.

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MANUAL OF COMMUNITY PAEDIATRICS  
Leon Polnay (ed)  
222 pages. Price £9.95

This book was written to complement Community paediatrics which is a useful textbook in a field which is still short of good material. Manual of community paediatrics is intended as a guide to good clinical practice, and is written in note form, which makes it easy to refer to quickly. The index, although short, is inadequate.

The early chapters, which concentrate on child health surveillance and children with special needs, are good and provide helpful information about the materials required and developmental milestones. There are, however, several unsatisfactory aspects of the long chapter on clinical problems: in the section on fits no mention is made of the management of the condition; otitis media is not covered, while the common cold and roseola infantum receive half a page each; verrucae and warts are discussed twice, and appear to merit much more attention than epiglottitis, one of the most feared acute emergencies in clinical practice.

This manual is aimed at new doctors in community practice, health visitors, school nurses and general practitioners, and it is disappointing that there are no general practitioners among the contributors. The book has valuable features for the general practitioner, but it could not be used as a guide to many of the clinical problems in general practice.

DW. HOLTON  
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LOCATION AND STIGMA  
Contemporary perspectives on mental health and mental health care  
Christopher J. Smith and John A. Giggs  
309 pages. Price £35.00

This collection of original papers takes as its theme the major influence of location as a social factor influencing mental morbidity. This application of geography to urban management policy is discussed within the constraints imposed by prevailing resistance, stigma. Using demographic data, the studies concentrate on the possible links between general aspects of the environment and mental illness, for example unemployment, economic deprivation, state planning and urban housing. Then, mapping major mental disease markers such as suicide, alcoholism, accidents and psychosis from hospital data demonstrates pockets of high density contained in well defined areas within inner cities and remote rural areas. This encourages further study into these areas to demonstrate the importance of environmental and genetic factors.

The studies on stigma discuss the implications of discharging patients into the community and the current trend for community care rather than institutionalization. They indicate that a common factor in reducing stigma for mentally ill patients in the community is provision of small scale dwelling houses kept in good external repair which blend into the neighbourhood rather than large impersonal hostels.

Geography, distance, transportation and provision of community amenities have a major impact on clinical decision making, cost effective patient care and community attitudes to mental health. Patients judge the quality of the service offered as much by externals such as the fabric of the building and its presence in their neighbourhood as by the professional qualities of the doctors within.

This book challenges us to think beyond the everyday concerns of identification and treatment of mental disease and disease which are probably the leading causes of disability in most developed countries today.

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