



### CAUSAL RELATIONSHIPS IN MEDICINE

#### A practical system for critical appraisal

*J. Mark Elwood*

*Oxford University Press (1989)*

*332 pages. Price £30.00*

The book is aimed at students starting out in health research and at health professionals needing to evaluate research findings in their own field. It is thus very relevant to research in general practice.

There are chapters on selecting an appropriate study design and on avoiding errors arising in research owing to selection, measurement, sample size, chance, method of analysis and interpretation. The constant reference to published papers makes the book easy and interesting to read and one is shown simply and clearly how to analyse data from real research.

The methods of statistical analysis described deal only with data which is expressed in categories, so for completeness, doctors interested in research may still need an introductory text on medical statistics. Statistical analysis is based on the Mantel Haenszel version of the well known chi-squared test, and general practitioners would be advised to consider this method when analysing research involving confounding variables.

Even if you do not carry out your own analysis, the book remains worthwhile reading for the critical appraisals it offers of three major papers. These provide a model for the assessment of your own and your colleagues' research.

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### COMMUNICATING WITH PATIENTS

#### Improving communication, satisfaction and compliance

*Philip Ley*

*Croom Helm, London (1988)*

*210 pages. Price £9.95*

The aim of this book is to enable readers — be they doctors, nurses, physiotherapists or students — to practise their profession more effectively. In just over 200 pages Ley describes how best to provide health related information to patients. The critical issues of patient satisfaction, understanding, memory and compliance are examined concisely along with relevant evidence from research. The reader is taken through each topic logically with the minimum of jargon and each chapter ends with a summary. A glossary of largely statistical terms is provided along with a full list of references, a useful index and an excellent final section listing practical conclusions.

Workers in the United Kingdom, particularly general practitioners and psychologists, have been actively examining doctor-patient communication for several years. The ability to interview patients effectively and appropriately is now taken

seriously — even for undergraduates in medical school. However, some published work can be speculative, while the equipment used to enhance examination of the communication process can feel intrusive to the doctor and perhaps to the patient.

Ley's book is very accessible and it should be bought, read and used by anybody wishing to be more effective in communicating with patients.

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### THE NEW PUBLIC HEALTH

*John Ashton and Howard Seymour*

*Open University Press, Milton Keynes (1988)*

*184 pages. Price £27.50 (h/b), £9.95 (p/b)*

It is good to be reminded by the authors of the *The new public health* of the views expressed more than a decade ago by Professor McKeown that preventive measures along with improvements in nutritional and other environmental factors are the key to improved health — a view endorsed at that time by the Lalonde report in Canada. The so called new public health is an approach which 'brings together environmental change and personal and preventive measures with appropriate therapeutic interventions'.

This book gives a valuable historical overview and outlines the current thinking behind the Black report, the World Health Organization's 'Global strategy of health for all by the year 2000' and current trends in North America. An attempt to achieve this in practice is illustrated by the actions of the Mersey regional health promotion unit, which are described in great detail.

The authors provide a valuable compilation of the current literature, though it is irritating to read lists of the main points from various sources which the reader is left to synthesize. Nevertheless, the book provides a good source of information for all who are involved in policy making in order to improve the health of high-risk groups in the population.

J.S. BERKELEY

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### DISABLING DISEASES

#### Physical, environmental and psychological management

*Andrew Frank and Peter Maguire*

*Heinemann, Oxford (1989)*

*277 pages. Price £14.95*

The concept of putting together a dozen or so chapters on disabling diseases is a very attractive one to general practitioners. This book not only deals comprehensively with such problems as in-