



FAMILY DOCTORS AND ECONOMIC INCENTIVES

Nick Bosanquet and Brenda Leese

Dartmouth Publishing Company, Aldershot (1989)

149 pages. Price £19.50

The government's white papers and new contract for general practice have certainly concentrated minds on how general practice can be organized, managed and paid for in the future. The debate continues and the eventual outcomes are still not clear.

With canny timing, Nick Bosanquet and Brenda Leese publish the results of a study which attempts to determine how economic considerations influence practice decisions at a local level. They hypothesize that practice strategy will be influenced by the personal characteristics, professional contacts and motivation of the family doctor, and by the local environment of the practice. They postulate also that practice strategy will reflect the financial pressures which face a practice, with those practices which have been most active in changing their structure and in developing their services facing greatest financial constraint.

The study was carried out in seven family practitioner committee areas in England with widely differing social characteristics. All family doctors there were invited to complete questionnaires and personal interviews with the study team. The study concentrates on three factors — participating in the cost rent scheme, the employment of a practice nurse and participation in a training scheme — all of which reflect financial outlay on improvements. Practices scoring on two or more factors were designated 'innovators', those scoring none were termed 'traditionalists' and the others as 'intermediates'. The results are a treasure trove of new data on general practice.

In this book there is something for everyone, from individual principals and trainees taking stock of their future to policy makers seeking local investment more appropriate to local needs. I would recommend every practice to order their copy now.

DONALD IRVINE

General practitioner, Ashington

COMPUTERS — A GUIDE TO CHOOSING AND USING

Andrew Willis and Thomas Stewart

Oxford University Press (1989)

138 pages. Price £6.95

Many practices are preoccupied with choosing and installing a computer system. Some need guidance; all would be well advised to read *Computers — a guide to choosing and using*.

The authors are clearly enthusiastic devotees of computerized practice records, drawing on existing experience to present

a balanced account of the benefits as well as the potential hazards of computerization. The book sensibly discusses the advantages of computerized records in practice management and provides a detailed consideration of the effects on staff, patients, premises and records. Much-needed advice is given on preparing for these changes and the use of computers in the day-to-day running of a practice is described in considerable detail, which serves as a useful checklist for evaluating the various systems on offer.

The legal and financial aspects affecting the choice of a system are discussed, and data entry is dealt with carefully and with much practical advice. I felt the comprehensive bibliography was useful.

The illustrations are of little value and the text is somewhat repetitive. Nevertheless, this book sets the gold standard on how to computerize a practice — a standard which few will achieve but all should emulate.

D.J. HENRY

Lecturer in general practice,

Nottingham University Medical School

MANAGING STRESS

David Fontana

British Psychological Society and Routledge, London (1989)

128 pages. Price £14.95 (h/b), £5.95 (p/b)

The reduction in the prescribing of benzodiazepines has led general practitioners to search for other ways of managing stress. I was therefore delighted when this book in the 'Problems in practice series' arrived on my desk, expecting from its title to find an answer to this problem.

However, I discovered that the book is aimed at professional people who wish to tackle their own problems of stress. The final chapter on 'managing yourself' discusses the value of meditation and other forms of relaxation. The subject is demystified and straightforward instructions on how to proceed are given — a patient instruction leaflet based on these ideas would be useful in practice. Unfortunately as a medical reader I found the physiological explanations given throughout the text a little simplistic.

I was left with the feeling that, so long as access to clinical psychology remains so limited, the management of stress in general practice will always include accurate diagnosis, regular sympathetic counselling and the use of tapes, leaflets and books such as this one.

MARTIN BARKER

General practitioner, Stamford, Lincs