



### TALKING WITH PATIENTS

**A basic clinical skill**

*Philip R. Myerscough (ed)*

*Oxford University Press (1989)*

*148 pages. Price £9.95*

### THE CLINICAL ENCOUNTER

**A guide to the medical interview and case presentation**

*J. Andrew Billings and John D. Stoeckle*

*Year Book Medical Publications, Chicago (1989)*

*305 pages. Price £12.50*

Deputy chief of services in obstetrics and gynaecology to the Sultanate of Oman may seem an unusual post for the author of a book for medical students on how to communicate with patients. Yet Philip Myerscough's 150 page paperback quickly gets to the heart of consulting with delicate and sensitive sections on comfort with *acceptance*, *responsiveness* and *empathy* (care). His co-authors treat dying, childhood, adolescence and sexuality with simple directness which creates the right atmosphere for learning how to be professional and kind at the same time.

The larger American book by two professors of medicine at the Harvard medical school is, by contrast, an exhaustive manual of the formidably named 'clinical encounter': questions to ask, techniques of interviewing, 'further tactics for eliciting information', how to make a home visit (in the USA) and how to present a case at a meeting and record it fully in writing. The book has too many headings and sub-headings and a confusing number of different typefaces and sizes. However, it covers all the important aspects of the consultation — listening, honesty, support and involving the family.

These two books share the key premise that the relationship and the history are what matter most. Physical examinations and tests are luxuries that are often superfluous and will always take second place.

NICHOLAS BRADLEY

*General practitioner, Exeter*

### SKILLS AND MANAGEMENT IN FAMILY MEDICINE

*E.K. Koh, L.G. Goh and P. Kee*

*P G Publishing, Singapore (1988)*

*265 pages. Price \$30.00*

This book, written by experienced general practitioners from Singapore, has as its main focus the psychosocial aspects of medical care. A definition of the scope of general practice leads to a consideration of the doctor-patient relationship and on to

chapters dealing with human behaviour, the skills involved in handling problems and influences of family and culture on medical care. The book ends with a brief consideration of aspects of practice organization and a pithy series of medical axioms. A reading list and index round off this neatly presented book.

Although the authors are not explicit about the intended readership, this is the sort of book which some trainees in UK general practice are likely to find interesting for three reasons. First, it brings together much useful material which is currently spread over a variety of different publications. Secondly, it demonstrates the extent to which general practice worldwide has been influenced by the pioneers mainly from the Royal College of General Practitioners (some two thirds of the bibliography originated in the UK). Thirdly, the reader is afforded fascinating glimpses of general practice in a culture and under a system of health care both of which are so different from the UK; despite this, it is the similarities rather than the differences in peoples' needs and demands which comes across most strongly.

JAMES D.E. KNOX

*Head of department of general practice, University of Dundee*

### MUSCULOSKELETAL PAIN AND DISABILITY

*Paul E. Kaplan and Ellen D. Tanner*

*Appleton and Lange, London (1989)*

*353 pages. Price £33.75*

Every day a general practitioner deals with musculoskeletal problems and I opened the book with eager anticipation. The first disappointment is that it is written by 11 other contributors as well as the two main authors. The result is an example of the cardinal errors of a multi-author book, where lack of editorial guidance and control leads to poor structure of the individual chapters, each of which needs to be taken on its own, and an absence of systematic layout, which makes for difficult reading.

On the positive side, there is a mass of information about treatments of common and rare conditions, although the quantity of text does not equate to the relative frequency of conditions — there are two full pages on the rare thoracic outlet syndromes and only half a side on osteoarthritis of the hip.

One of my favourite books is *The complete plain words* by Sir Ernest Gowers, which should be required reading for anyone who intends to write a medical article, still more a book. Any merit there might be within the pages of *Musculoskeletal pain and disability* is lost by the verbosity of the narrative. Ironically, abbreviations are everywhere — I learned that WHO stands not only for World Health Organization, but also wrist-hand orthosis. Finally, a book whose preface bravely announces it