



### 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

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### 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

as 'a new and original effort at interdisciplinary communication' may have failed because it tries to be all things to all disciplines. I regret I cannot recommend it to general practitioners.

R.M. MILNE  
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### NURSING A PROBLEM

*Lesley Mackay*  
*Open University Press, Milton Keynes (1989)*  
*200 pages. Price £25.00 h/b, £9.95 p/b*

This book concerns the problems of nurses working in the National Health Service and should be of interest to all health professionals. The author, a sociologist, obtained the views of over 700 nurses, working in a variety of settings, in one health authority area. Self-completion questionnaires and interviews were used to collect the information.

Respondents' quotes are used liberally and, at the end of each chapter, the author draws her conclusions. Unfortunately, we are not told how the nurses or the quotes were selected, how the study was introduced or what questions or comments generated the answers. There can be no doubt that the author has been successful in highlighting some key problems within nursing, such as constraints, frustrations, constant changes, thwarted idealism and lack of tolerance. However, her approach seemed to invite reports of problems and difficulties and if there were any sources of satisfaction, they did not stand much chance of being included.

The author makes no unjustified claims of generalizability and states clearly that the picture she describes is her own view. With that important proviso, her report deserves attention.

LISBETH HOCKEY  
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*University of Edinburgh*

### ON-CALL

*Out-of-hours telephone calls and home visits*  
*J.D.E. Knox*  
*Oxford University Press (1989)*  
*66 pages. Price £5.95*

The series *Practical guides for general practice* has covered a variety of subjects including screening, immunization and several clinical topics. It also includes the best book yet written on practice computing. This latest monograph pulls together most of the literature on out-of-hours primary care and should be essential reading for vocational trainees and aspiring practice managers. It will serve as a valuable reference book for anyone with more than a passing interest in the organization of primary care.

The way in which general practitioners deal with out-of-hours responsibilities is an emotive subject and in *On-call* both the patients' and the doctors' needs and rights are viewed in an objective and non-partisan manner. There must always be a compromise between availability and accessibility and Professor Knox treads a wise and wary path. He makes the assumption that British general practitioners prefer the continuity of their own practices to the services of independent deputizing agencies, yet fully recognizes the problems and constraints imposed by modern city life.

This book is full of practical information on different telephone systems and on the organization and documentation of out-of-hours work. Interpersonal aspects are well covered, including the importance of intermediaries between patient and doctor, and patients' views and needs are carefully considered. What equipment to take to an out-of-hours call is discussed, as are the occasions when doctors might decide that taking any equipment could put themselves at unacceptable risk. Mention of the need for a police escort comes as a shock to this reviewer in his rural enclave.

MALCOLM AYLETT  
*General practitioner, Wooler, Northumberland*

### FAMILIES, SERVICES AND CONFUSION IN OLD AGE

*Enid Leven, Ian Sinclair and Peter Gorbach*  
*Avebury, Hants (1989)*  
*328 pages. Price £29.50*

The somewhat clumsy title of this book at least describes its remit. The authors are concerned to draw attention to the impact on carers and the health and social services of the progressive dependency produced by dementia and this they have certainly done. They describe a survey they have conducted and review the literature and all the problems involved with dementia in a thorough manner. This conscientiousness, however, is not without cost for it leads the authors to give seemingly endless examples to illustrate every point, which makes for turgid reading in some parts. These examples are sometimes thumbnail sketches of family problems and sometimes quotations. The situations described are all too familiar to any member of the public and constant repetition seems pointless. Most chapters, however, end with a summary of the main points and these are excellent. The chapters on services are first class and the conclusions should be required reading for all doctors, especially in the light of recent reports of some carers not getting the support to which they are entitled in the community.

This is a book for the practice library, as a source of reference and to help with teaching.

A.J. TULLOCH  
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*University of Oxford*

### UNDERSTANDING HAEMOPHILIA

*A personal account and practical guide for parents, teachers and the caring professions*  
*Marie Berger*  
*Ashgrove Press, Bath (1989)*  
*143 pages. Price £4.95*

To be told that your child has a serious incurable condition is devastating for any parent. When the disorder is also genetically determined, there is the added fear for the health of other children in the family, their children, and any future pregnancies. While expecting her fourth baby Marie Berger learnt that her third child had haemophilia and then that his elder sister also had the condition.

Her book confronts the emotional turmoil of such a situation. She explains in simple language the facts about haemophilia and dispels the fallacies and misconceptions that abound. There is practical advice about dealing with problems as they arise without letting them dominate people's lives.