

reach too wide an audience in one book. I would also have liked to have read more about the family context and dynamics and the way in which these relate to an individual's perception of health.

These criticisms are, however, fairly minor and overall I found this comprehensive book highly readable and well laid out together with being interesting and thought provoking. It certainly deserves to be read not only by nurses but by those studying medicine at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, and perhaps particularly by those of us involved in general practice.

ANGUS HOPPE

General practitioner, Edinburgh

RESEARCH METHODS IN PSYCHIATRY:

A beginner's guide

Chris Freeman and Peter Tyrer (eds)

The Royal College of Psychiatrists, London (1989)

240 pages. Price £10.00

Not every doctor will become a dedicated researcher but an understanding of research principles and methods is essential for effective critical enquiry or performance review and thus for improved patient care. Like their psychiatrist colleagues, general practitioner trainees increasingly accept the link between individual research and better clinical practice. Chris Freeman and Peter Tyrer have drawn on their experience of running research methodology courses to assemble a beginner's guide which succeeds admirably in its aims. Though primarily intended for trainee psychiatrists, there is much that is common to research work in any scientific discipline and much that is of interest to general practitioners.

Besides the standard topics covered in the introduction, the authors give advice on 'getting supervision' and 'keeping a research diary' and counsel on 'coping with failure and how to prevent it'. They amuse by examining the motivation for carrying out research and give a range of predicted success probabilities, from 'keeping a critical attitude' ($P=0.75$) to 'fame, prestige and glory' ($P=0.0001$). There is a useful checklist of the functions of a statistical coordinator but some duplication of advice on preparing a protocol. For general practitioners the three chapters on rating scales may seem overlong but many will be intrigued by the chapter on research with single (or few) patients.

This pocket-sized book is concise and readable with clear and sometimes humorous diagrams and illustrations lightening the reading load. There are extensive references, an extended reading list, a short but helpful glossary and a workmanlike index. Throughout, there is the reassuring feel of authors with 'hands on' experience of their subject which will ensure a favoured place on my bookshelf for this book.

ALASTAIR F WRIGHT

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FOLLIES AND FALLACIES IN MEDICINE

Petr Skrabanek and James McCormick

Tarragon Press, Glasgow (1989)

170 pages. Price £7.95

A delightful book, fresh and direct in its writing, *Follies and fallacies in medicine* attacks with relish the icons of contemporary medicine.

After first considering the power of the placebo, there are chapters on the fallacies which result from a poor understanding of scientific methods, pitfalls in diagnosis and labelling, risks entailed in prevention and the lack of evidence for fashionable alternative medicine. There is also a short chapter on the differences between science and medicine.

The book is wide ranging and many aspects of current medical practice come under the searchlight of these self-acknowledged sceptics. Their aim is to attack the uncritical acceptance of existing medical practice which they see as an impediment to progress. There is a paradox at the heart of clinical medicine — as clinicians, doctors are aware of the benefits to patients of displaying therapeutic confidence while, as scientists, they need to be aware of the uncertainties which exist in most of clinical medicine.

This book should be read not only by general practitioners but by all doctors and medical students. The authors are well known for their questioning of the morality and practicality of health promotion and their views on this are well covered in the chapter on prevention. The other chapters are equally stimulating and unlike most medical tests, the style is sharp and witty. Catholic in its use of source material, non-conformist in its approach, the book is a pleasure to read.

GRAHAM BUCKLEY

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Further particulars can be obtained from Professor J.H. Barber, Department of General Practice, Woodside Health Centre, Barr Street, Glasgow G20 7LR with whom applications together with the names of two referees should be lodged by 31st March, 1990.

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