



## HEALTH AND LIFESTYLES

*Mildred Blaxter*

*Tavistock/Routledge, London (1990)*

*268 pages. Price £12.95*

This is an important book, both for the empirical data it contains and for the sophistication of its analysis and interpretation. The data derive from the national health and lifestyle survey, conducted in 1984–85 among a national random sample of 9003 men and women over the age of 17 years. The preliminary report of the survey was published by the Health Promotion Research Trust in 1987. This volume reports the results of a much more exhaustive and penetrative analysis of the architectural structure of the data.

Blaxter has used the survey data to construct four major categories of variables: health, social circumstances, behaviour, and attitudes and beliefs. The business of constructing these variables is theoretically sophisticated, drawing extensively upon the existing literature, and it involves quite complex ways of combining and presenting the results of interviews and of physiological measurements. The bulk of the book is taken up with a meticulous examination of these variables and their interrelationships. It is therefore probably a book to refer to rather than to read.

It would do grave injustice to the quality and sophistication of the analysis to attempt to summarize the major findings, for in a sense there are none. The single most important message is that of the complexity of the relationship between people's attitudes, social circumstances, behaviour and health, and consequently the futility of believing that there are easy or simple ways of changing or improving people's health experiences. Blaxter does not even begin to discuss the implications of her analysis for health policy and practice. What she does do, however, is to present an analysis of this complex territory that explores many of the easy and naive assumptions that underlie much of the current debate about health promotion. Her book will be ignored by policy makers, practitioners and academics at their peril.

JOHN BUTLER

*Professor of health services studies, University of Kent at Canterbury*

## CHANGING IDEAS IN HEALTH CARE

*David Seedhouse and Alan Cribb (eds)*

*John Wiley, Chichester (1990)*

*234 pages. Price £9.95*

This is a collection of articles by a group of authors representing a wide range of people involved in health care. The title of the book embraces a pun and its preface begins with a phrase I find anathema: 'It is well known that ...'. Despite these two adverse comments, I would recommend this book to all health

care workers as a bedside book to dip into. Its structure is that of a literary anthology with the editors providing a preface and an introduction and also further introductions to each of the three sub-sections explaining what the authors of the articles say. The 13 articles survive this excessively pedagogic treatment. Each of them represents someone's hobbyhorse and a fine collection they are to ride.

Michael Kearney opens with a restrained, person-based description of hospice medicine. P G F Nixon expands on his notions concerning human functions and the heart, Jane Eardley describes the effects of a cancer self-help group, and Jane Cleary the working in hospital of a care by parent scheme for child patients. The other nine articles have a similarly wide spread of cover but their context is the community not the hospital. The editors say that the underlying principle of the articles concerns valuing people. They are correct and their book should be read and will be valued by all health care workers.

PAUL FREELING

*Head of Division of General Practice and Primary Care, St George's Hospital Medical School, London*

## PSYCHOLOGICAL MANAGERMENTS FOR PSYCHOSOMATIC DISORDERS

*J W Paulley and H E Pelsler (eds)*

*Springer-Verlag, Heidelberg (1989)*

*335 pages. Price £35.00*

This excellent book is a unique guide not only to the psychopathology behind psychosomatic disorders, but also to the practical management of these disorders within the time constraints of a busy general hospital setting. The editors, both senior physicians with long clinical experience, cover the whole field of internal medicine, system by system, while the chapters on dermatology, obstetrics and gynaecology and sexual function have been written by experts in these fields. An unusual feature of the book is the inclusion of several transcripts which demonstrate typical doctor-patient interactions for different psychosomatic disorders.

As a general practitioner I found that this book enriched my clinical practice. In our surgeries we see patients suffering from most of the disorders described by the authors. Unlike them, however, we have had a much longer relationship with our patients, and we see them long before the diagnosis is established. Knowledge of the mechanisms underlying common psychosomatic disorders such as hyperventilation syndrome, irritable bowel syndrome, vascular headaches, severe hypertension and urethral syndrome can be a great help in improving our management of these conditions and avoiding unnecessary referrals and investigations.

The authors believe that psychological management should be tailored to fit the medical diagnosis. The concept of psychosomatic specificity was formulated initially by Franz