

CHILD HEALTH IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

John Black

British Medical Journal, London (1990)

88 pages. Price £6.95

It is ironic that if you copy from one author it is plagiarism but if you copy from more than one author it counts as research. John Black, a consultant paediatrician, has written this useful book after much research. The first edition of the book in 1985 had the title *The new paediatrics: child health in ethnic minorities*. Hopefully, some professors in general practice will one day realize the change that has occurred in British society as a whole, and what they see today as 'inner city problems' will emerge tomorrow as a wealth of ethnic minority cultures. Indeed, the title page with pictures of black and white children reflects the fact that Britain now has a fair sample of the Commonwealth populations.

The difficulties which ethnic minority children face in Britain today and how they make contact with health services are described in two early chapters. An account of the cultural and medical problems of four major ethnic groups — Asians, Afro-Caribbeans and Africans, Cypriots (Greeks or Turks) and Chinese as well as Vietnamese — is given in the remaining five easy-to-read chapters. The general practitioner, for example, is informed that lactase deficiency varies with race. It is present in about 20% of Europeans, 33% of North Indians (and Pakistanis), 60% of South Indians (and Sri Lankans), 40% of Cypriots and Italians and the highest incidence, 75 to 100%, is among the Chinese (and Vietnamese) and Japanese living in Britain.

This book contains much useful clinical information and I would strongly recommend it to all general practitioners and practice staff.

BASHIR QURESHI

*General practitioner, Hounslow, London***A PROTESTANT LEGACY****Attitudes to health and illness among older Aberdonians**

Rory Williams

Clarendon Press, Oxford (1990)

371 pages. Price £37.50

Written by a medical sociologist, this book is based on interviews with, and case studies of, older people living in Aberdeen who were brought up in a strong protestant tradition. Throughout the book the main concern is with the way in which ideas about coping with illness, ageing and death are influenced by local economic and religious experiences. The questions

posed by the author are complex and cannot be answered by his fairly limited enquiry, which he does acknowledge. This problem is demonstrated by the final chapter which attempts to summarize the main findings but which is fragmentary and fails to convey the author's conclusions clearly to the reader.

The author has a tendency to make generalizations about wider society and research findings without quoting his sources. This omission will frustrate readers who want to pursue the sources, or query the statements made. However, the major part of the book is concerned with the author's own research. He rarely cites figures but given the qualitative style of the research prefers to use the terms 'most', 'some' and so on. He discusses consultation behaviour and communication between doctor and patient. He argues that delay in seeking a consultation in Aberdeen is an expression of 'a duty to exclude the charge of hypochondria' and he reports that the search for 'knowledge and control', for example the wish to know the diagnosis and prognosis, is a predominantly middle class characteristic. He describes how patients reported that they remain silent in consultations where they disagree with their doctors, or because they feel that their doctor could be irritated by too many questions. The middle class respondents tended to interpret conflicts of judgement as a sign that the doctor was wrong 'not that the patient was delinquent'.

A further chapter describes people's attitudes to health and illness and how these are influenced by 'moral criticism'. Other chapters deal with illness, old age, dying, bereavement, work, wealth and religion. These sections are fascinating but generally the author presents his own interpretation of interview material and reanalysis of case studies. The direct research evidence is only presented in the form of short quotations, often of one line only. This is disappointing as I had hoped for a wealth of qualitative data as well as the author's interpretation. The reader needs to be able to judge the extent to which the author's interpretation is biased by his theoretical perspective and when little original material is presented it is impossible to do this.

Aside from the shortcomings outlined, *A protestant legacy* is an interesting book and worth reading for its insights into the behaviour and beliefs of one group of people, however atypical.

ANN BOWLING

*Senior lecturer in health services research,
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine***Corrigendum**

In the review of the video 'HIV and AIDS' (*July Journal*, p.309) the price was incorrectly given as £95.00. The correct price is £39.50.

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