



## CULTURE, HEALTH AND ILLNESS

### Second Edition

Cecil G Helman

Wright Butterworth Scientific, Guildford (1990)

344 pages. Price £12.95

Since the first edition of this book was published in 1984 it has become a classic text of relevance in all branches of medicine. Dr Helman is himself a general practitioner and his book is of particular importance in general practice. Our discipline is the interface between medicine and society. Culture and context are crucial determinants of the ways in which patients present their problems to general practitioners.

As well as adding new material from the recent literature on cultural issues in health and illness, the second edition includes a new chapter on sex, reproduction and childbirth. The book successfully draws from a wide variety of sources and is authoritative while remaining enjoyable and easy to read. It warns against making sweeping generalizations on the basis of the cultural background of individuals. Within all cultures, individual variation is considerable and it is all too easy for us to form stereotypes of different ethnic groups. Everyone involved in clinical work will find this book enriching and illuminating. It cannot be recommended too highly.

GRAHAM BUCKLEY

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## YEAR BOOK OF FAMILY PRACTICE 1990

R E Rakel, R F Avant, C F Driscoll, J G Pritchard and C W Smith (eds)

Wolfe Publishing, London (1990)

516 pages. Price £41.50

This important contribution to the discipline of family medicine provides a wealth of new reading in summary form with editorial comment on most of the articles. On average this yields one page per published paper and gives a useful balance between content and comment. The papers are all relevant to family doctors.

The book is mainly organized around bodily systems, for example, endocrinology, haematology and neurology. However, pathological systems are also used, for example, neoplasms and infectious disease. There is a refreshing escape from the age-related specialties: only paediatrics is separated out for a chapter. The most welcome chapter is the last in the book on family problems. Here the reader will find seven pages of reviewed papers which draw heavily on general systems theory applied to the family. This should be the first rather than the last chapter in the *Year book of family medicine* because of the importance of a systems approach to our discipline. The approach is well illustrated in all age groups but major family pathology does dominate and this may make the average family doctor feel that

a systems approach is less relevant in his or her work, which is not true.

I was surprised to find no reference to general systems theory or to the scientific basis of family medicine in the cumulative index of this important book. The chosen papers in the reductionist sections of the book would have been enhanced by an editorial comment highlighting how each can be related to general systems theory.

The 1990 *Year book of family medicine* is essential reading for every scholar in our discipline and postgraduates must be encouraged to discuss its contents critically if the international principles of family medicine are to be sustained and generated. I hope that general systems theory will influence the ordering of the 1991 edition and that all librarians will buy this book.

N C H STOTT

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## MAKING SENSE OF THE NEW CONTRACT

John Chisholm (ed)

Radcliffe Medical Press, Oxford (1990)

192 pages. Price £12.50

Few doctors ever study the National Health Service regulations or the *Statement of fees and allowances* (red book). This is regrettable but understandable given the legalistic approach of both documents. *Making sense of the new contract* is a new version of *Making sense of the red book* and is a worthy successor.

The book is readable, accurate, up to date and is an easily accessible reference for all general practitioners. It includes information on practitioners' terms of service and in the appendices provides an accurate index to the *Statement of fees and allowances* as well as listing all the general practice regulations published since 1974.

There is a small problem as far as Scottish general practitioners are concerned. The preface emphasizes that the book does not make specific reference to the differences between contractual arrangements in Scotland and those in England and Wales. However, it would be helpful if mention could be made where differences do occur, for example, in the supply of drugs and appliances and rural practice payments. As there are only a few differences perhaps a note could be included where relevant in the next edition.

I would strongly commend this excellent book which explains the complexities of the new contract in straightforward prose. It should be available in every practice not only for the principals and the trainees but also for the ancillary staff.

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