



## MEASURING HEALTH

**A review of quality of life measurements scales**

*A Bowling*

*Open University Press, Buckingham (1991)*

*199 pages. Price £35.00 (h/b), £12.99 (p/b)*

Health measurement and outcome measurement will be the new technologies for general practice in the next decade. There is already an extensive collection of conceptual works on the subject, and the author has chosen a different route with this book by cataloguing over 50 general health status measures. This approach means that the work is not one which can be considered easy to read. The short sections on conceptualizing quality of life and health measurement are compact, providing an outline which the reader new to the subject might find difficult to grasp.

Where Ann Bowling's book does have strength is in the meticulous review of each of the measures, using a structured format which provides opportunity for comparison. This has required a considerable search of the literature, not least because some of the measures do not stand up well to critique and the author therefore needs to be sure of her ground. It is this critical analysis which is most helpful to the reader who may be trying to choose a measure for a particular purpose. By being prepared to make a realistic assessment of the current evidence on aspects such as content, reliability, and usefulness, the author has created a valuable resource.

Health measurement is a complex process, not least because the effect of health care has to be separated from the influence of environment and lifestyle. *Measuring health* will be a useful reference for the increasing number of clinicians who are interested in measuring the effect of their care for patients.

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## OBTAINING THE VIEWS OF USERS OF HEALTH SERVICES

*Shirley McIver*

*King's Fund, London (1991)*

*102 pages. Price £7.50*

Recently a number of books have appeared on how to do patient surveys, stimulated by the growing emphasis on the consumer's viewpoint. McIver's book has a broader purpose. It begins by stressing the importance of being clear about the aim of getting feedback from consumers. McIver is sceptical about the claims made for some measures of patient satisfaction; as alternatives she discusses just how much can be learnt from investigations into users' experiences of particular aspects of service delivery.

McIver points out that different methods of investigation pro-

duce information of varying degrees of usefulness. For example, a suggestion box in the surgery produces interesting ideas for the practice to consider but gives no indication as to how widely shared these views are. There is thoughtful discussion of what may be considered as evidence of a need for action. A survey produces information: what counts as evidence must be agreed by those involved in delivering, managing and using the service.

Readers are then given a broad picture of what is involved in surveying consumer opinion. However, this is not a textbook of survey methods and nor does it claim to be. Those wanting to carry out a survey should look elsewhere for details of methodology, and should seek adequate and appropriate help. The aftermath — what to do with the evidence collected — is also considered. Importance is placed on feeding back results, not only to staff but to service users too.

McIver thus includes a great deal of important material in a readable book. It is relevant to anyone contemplating using evidence other than their own guesses to find out about service delivery. If digested properly it may help many survey projects to produce useful and usable results.

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## DAVIDSON'S PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE OF MEDICINE (16th edition)

*R W Edwards and I A D Bouchier (eds)*

*Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh (1991)*

*1024 pages. Price £19.50*

In their preface the editors state their hope that *Davidson's principles and practice of medicine* 'will continue to instruct and stimulate undergraduates and postgraduates around the world'. I fear this aspiration is the downfall of the book. It is probably not possible for a book which aims to instruct and stimulate a clinical medical student, to also meet the learning needs of an experienced general practitioner. Of all its potential audiences, I suspect this book most adequately fulfils the requirements of a medical student in the early years of clinical studies.

Several preliminary chapters outline the major factors contributing to disease, although socio-economic factors are notably absent from consideration. There is a chapter on psychiatry and one on skin diseases: both are too brief for the student to avoid having to supplement the information with more specific texts. Many paediatric topics are, likewise, given a cursory treatment that allows the editors to claim comprehensiveness, but which is insufficient for the medical student's needs. Given the presence of these chapters from other clinical disciplines, the omission of any separate consideration of the special problems of the elderly is surprising.

On the positive side, this edition is presented more clearly than