



THE AFTERMATH OF STROKE: THE EXPERIENCE OF PATIENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES

R Anderson

Cambridge University Press (1992)

262 pages. Price £35.00

This book, written by an experienced social scientist of international standing, is the definitive report on a study of stroke patients and their carers. The study was carried out in Greenwich between 1983 and 1985. One hundred and seventy three stroke patients and their main supporters were followed for 18 months from the onset of the stroke. While the more clinical aspects of stroke, including factors influencing medical management and rehabilitation, have already been well researched and some of the broader social effects explored over recent years, this study concentrates more on the views, attitudes and preferences of stroke patients and their carers.

The experiences of stroke patients and their families relating to the onset of the stroke, medical care, the early post-stroke phase, rehabilitation and longer term outcomes are recorded. The text and tables of the report are interspersed with many quotations from patients, carers and doctors, capturing and conveying their views, attitudes and feelings. The quotations bring the report to life and serve to highlight many of the aspects of stroke and post-stroke experience that are otherwise difficult to measure. This is a fascinating and thought provoking book of relevance to anyone involved in the care and rehabilitation of stroke patients and their families.

ANDREW CARSON

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THE WRITINGS OF JOHN HUNT

John Horder (ed)

Royal College of General Practitioners, London (1992)

401 pages. Price £55.00

In the early 1950s, two men who shared the same name achieved distinction by overcoming tremendous odds. One led the first expedition to conquer nature's highest topographic obstacle, Mount Everest. The other faced barriers within the medical profession which, while not physical, were attitudinally almost as great as Everest. He successfully catalysed the efforts to establish a college of general practitioners. Both men were called John Hunt and in later years both went to the House of Lords. The second is Lord Hunt of Fawley, whose writings are the subject of this book.

As a general practitioner, John Hunt spent his professional life in private practice in central London but whenever he wrote about British general practice it was from the standpoint of promoting National Health Service general practice and the role of the general practitioner within the NHS.

The book ranges through some of the many fields which interested the author. There are accounts of clinical research into burns and Raynaud's phenomenon, of the early years of the College of General Practitioners, his views on the development of general practice and his speeches in the House of Lords. Here, his ideas are expressed with organized clarity in taut and lucid prose.

Elsewhere the style is more relaxed. The sections on insomnia, doctors as patients, and religion and the family doctor are spiced with anecdotes. At times the prose becomes almost poetic.

The book is a limited edition in hardback and, by its nature, it will never date. Few books contain such wisdom. The book is enhanced by John Horder's objectively sympathetic introduction in which he asks the question 'Why did John Hunt choose a career in general practice?' The answers are many and complex; you will need to read the book to find them.

RODDY HUGHES

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UNDERSTANDING BENEFITS

Simon Ennals

British Medical Journal, London (1992)

80 pages. Price £7.00

Many general practitioners feel guilty about their limited knowledge of the social security system and its frequent changes, preferring to leave it to social workers and citizens advice bureaux to guide patients through the complexities. It has been said that a degree in public administration is required to understand and competently claim for all the benefits available, and that as a result those most in need are unlikely to obtain what they are entitled to. Many elderly people still regard the system as a kind of charity. *Understanding benefits* is a simple and up to date guide to the current benefits available, those which are means tested and those which are not, how the social fund is administered and how patients, their carers and others can claim.

There are chapters on all the benefits that patients can obtain including incapacity benefits, care allowances for severely disabled people, the mobility component of the disability allowance, maternity benefits, industrial injuries benefits and details about benefits payable to people in residential care.

I found the book easy to read and it helped me understand much more clearly the complex set of rules and regulations; it should be essential reading for all general practitioners and their primary care teams.

JOHN COHEN

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