



## **REGULATING BRITISH MEDICINE: THE GENERAL MEDICAL COUNCIL**

*M Stacey*

*John Wiley, Chichester (1992)*

*293 pages. Price £15.95*

This book, written by a sociologist and former lay member of the General Medical Council, comprises 270 pages of prose, interspersed with headings, quotations, figures and tables dealing in a systematic way with the functions of the General Medical Council.

It is an accurate account of the General Medical Council from its inception in the 19th century to the present day. The different pressures for change, initially from within the ranks of the profession and latterly from the public and other professions, as well as the arduous and sometimes provocative steps by which those changes came about are detailed. The professional old boy network is dissected; the myth that the male doctor knows best is laid bare and the inclusion of lay members on the various disciplinary committees of the council is shown to be for the benefit of both the accused doctor and the public, a situation exemplified in general practice with its service committee system.

Although I found some of the extreme detail in the book rather tedious the reasons behind their inclusion are understandable for the sake of perspicacious accuracy.

I think the case has been made for the author's concern that if the General Medical Council drags its heels and does not carry though its present wide ranging enquiry quickly then others will make an attempt to speed that process, thereby possibly losing the profession the ability to regulate itself in the future. I would recommend this book to all members of the profession.

**JOHN R CRISPIN**

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## **HEALTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

*Fiona Godlee and Alison Walker (eds)*

*British Medical Journal, London (1992)*

*126 pages. Price £7.95*

The interdependence of economic development, ecological sustainability and an environment which promotes health is increasingly being recognized. This book brings together 12 articles on this theme that were published in the *British Medical Journal*. The articles seek to promote wider awareness of our responsibilities for health and the environment.

Population pressures, climatic change, air quality, waste disposal, transport, noise, drinking and recreational water, and environmental radiation are considered. The articles are clearly presented, well referenced, cogently argued, and contain useful data. Each chapter outlines several practical ways forward. However, I would have liked to see some overall conclusions. A summary of what we should encourage individual patients

to adopt as their practical contributions for sustainable development, and how these contributions can benefit their personal health, would also have been useful.

The book reminded me of a symposium 'Preventive medicine — whose responsibility?' organized some 10 years ago by the Severn faculty of the Royal College of General Practitioners. It was agreed there that the contributions of general practice, public health medicine and occupational medicine are interdependent. For worthwhile risk assessment, management, communication and enlightened public policy, we need to be able to move comfortably between the 'clinical' and the 'population' approach. This book is an excellent example of what can be achieved with an integrated approach. It is fascinating reading and I recommend it.

**ROBIN PHILIPP**

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## **INTERVIEWING THE SEXUALLY ABUSED CHILD (fourth edition)**

*David P H Jones*

*Royal College of Psychiatrists, London (1992)*

*67 pages. Price £5.50*

Originally written for those professionals directly concerned with the elucidation and management of child sexual abuse, this slim volume has been updated and revised. The fourth edition has a chapter on screening which, unlike the rest of the book, is directed at the wide range of professionals who might encounter a sexually abused child in the course of their work, and would need to gather enough information to make a decision about referring on to the appropriate agency, usually the social services department.

The author cites a recent study in a general child psychiatric outpatients department, where the proportion of positive reports of child sexual abuse increased from 7% to 31% when child psychiatry team members were trained to ask screening questions about sexual abuse. He offers screening as one of a range of strategies which general practitioners and general paediatricians might use 'to enable the suspicion of child sexual abuse to be explored further'.

Much of this book is of practical importance only to specialist practitioners; however, general practitioners who are concerned with child care may find it helpful to discover the approach adopted by specialists. The chapter on screening (only four pages) hardly constitutes a reason to buy the book, but it could be argued that to screen effectively, a general practitioner needs to know more than simply how to ask screening questions — and that is the rest of the book.

**PETER CAMPION**

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