



**PARTNERSHIP WITH PATIENTS. A practical guide to starting a patient participation group**

*Peter Pritchard*

*Royal College of General Practitioners, London (1993)*

*25 pages. Price £6.00*

I have been an admirer of Peter Pritchard since the start of patient participation groups in the early 1970s. No one has done more to promote their establishment, and no one more effectively than in this little guide. His lifelong experience of general practice, his breadth of mind, his aptitude for organization and his writing talent all combine to make this a readable, and immensely practical, starting point for all who need to know about patient participation; and that means just about everyone connected with general practice. For some unaccountable reason patients themselves are omitted from the intended readership.

After some historical details, the guide sets out what patient participation can achieve: ensuring compatible goals, eliciting patients' views on services, helping under-served groups, linking with other networks, dealing with suggestions and complaints, offering health promotion, influencing other organizations, and supporting the work of the practice. After a brief look at the evaluation of groups, *Partnership with patients* goes on to describe other spin-offs such as developing an empathic organization, adapting to change, encouraging open medicine, providing resources and improving quality of care. Some of the obstacles are addressed including professional attitudes, advertising, and confidentiality. The booklet ends with detailed advice about the logistics of starting a group, and lists those organizations, such as the National Association for Patient Participation, which can help to make it a success.

TIM PAINE

*General practitioner, Bristol*

**STOP SMOKING (video)**

*Geoff Graham*

*Abbey Productions, Whitby (1992)*

*Running time 45 minutes. Price £13.99*

This video comes amid the growing mountain of self-help material that is currently available for smokers who wish to quit. The programme is presented by, and based on, the work of Geoff Graham who is currently president of the British Society of Medical and Dental Hypnosis. The video commences by describing some of the well known health risks associated with smoking. Geoff Graham then proceeds to use the technique of neuro-linguistic programming, in which viewers are presented with a series of images on which they are asked to reflect. It is made clear that this suggestive imagery is not the same as a formal

trance, but helps to encourage 'use of all your senses to make positive programmes in your mind'. Although the images are presented to smokers in a sequential way that progressively emphasizes their own ability to overcome the smoking habit, I found the visual presentation rather tedious and uninteresting. A few specific strategies were provided for helping individuals who had quit to cope with situations where they may be more inclined to want a cigarette, such as early in the morning or at meal times.

The only evidence that this particular technique may be effective as a smoking cessation method were the anecdotal reports of the presenter who claims that he has helped over 1000 of his private patients to become non-smokers. These claims were supported by testimonials from three former smokers who appeared on several occasions during the video.

In summary, this video may appeal to some smokers who have tried unsuccessfully to use other methods of quitting, and are still motivated to quit. They would obviously require the ability to understand and visualize the images that are presented. From that point of view it may be a useful video to recommend or make available to selected patients. However, before recommending widespread usage it is essential that there is sound scientific evidence, from randomized controlled trials, that this particular method is effective.

CHRIS SILAGY

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**HEALTH CHECKS FOR PEOPLE AGED 75 AND OVER Occasional paper 59**

*E I Williams and P Wallace (eds)*

*Royal College of General Practitioners, London (1993)*

*30 pages. Price £9.00*

This is something of a departure from the usual style of occasional papers. It is a practical compilation of useful assessment tools for assessing the health needs of people in the community. Taking as its starting point the contractual requirements for the assessment of people aged 75 years and over by general practitioners in the National Health Service, it builds on the reviews and recommendations in this area of clinical practice which are contained in *Occasional papers 35 and 45, Preventive care of the elderly: a review of current developments* and *Care of older people: a framework for progress*. The extensive research and practical experience of the authors is evident from the way in which they set out a clear strategy for monitoring the health of older people in the community. The most useful standardized and validated measures of dementia, depression, disability and dependency are included as appendices.

The authors endorse previous recommendations which advocated a stepwise approach to assessment so that most attention is

focused on those with greatest needs. Functional assessment is seen as the appropriate approach in seeking to improve the quality of life for older people. There is a helpful section on health checks for people in nursing or rest homes.

From local knowledge I am aware that practices are attempting to assess the health needs of their elderly patients in a wide variety of ways. Many practices have expressed a wish for clear guidance on the appropriate methods of assessment for their elderly patients and this occasional paper contains all the relevant information.

As one of the editors of *Occasional paper 35*, I have a vested interest in suggesting that *Occasional paper 59* should be seen as part of the package which includes the two previous occasional papers. Having had no part in the creation of *Occasional paper 59*, I am able to recommend it unreservedly. I expect that it will become the standard reference for practices as they develop systematic programmes of anticipatory care for their elderly patients.

GRAHAM BUCKLEY

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#### MAKING SENSE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

*Sally Irvine and Hilary Haman*

*Radcliffe Medical Press, Oxford (1993)*

*171 pages. Price £12.50*

As stated in the preface of this book, people are the most expensive resources in a practice. This is certainly true as staff budgets become eroded and staff numbers expand in many developing practices. Although management is viewed as a series of frameworks and structures used to achieve tasks, in fact it is effective interpersonal communication which makes for a successful management outcome. General practitioners have little formal training in management skills and are so busy coping with the day to day pressures that the importance of the relationships within the practice team is often forgotten. Few practices can function now without a practice manager and it is his/her role to facilitate teamwork and to see that limited resources, including people, are used as effectively as possible.

The books in the *Making sense* series are intended to explain basic principles of a particular subject and guidelines for their application. This one on personnel management is no exception and is written by two authors with extensive management experience including work in general practice.

The content of the book is much as one would expect, with chapters on recruitment, employment, training and many other subjects. A popular technique at present is staff appraisal. There is a good discussion about this, the pitfalls and the preparation required, which practices contemplating staff appraisal procedures will find valuable.

The text is clear and concise and liberally sprinkled with examples to illustrate a point. A case history of a practice is followed throughout the book to illustrate various issues in a realistic and graphic way.

This is a brief, well written and interesting book which sets out the basic principles of personnel management. It contains points to be aware of in these litigation conscious days of employment law. Most practice managers and general practitioners will find information of relevance to their staff management.

KEITH BOLDEN

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#### ABC OF DERMATOLOGY (second edition)

*K Paul Buxton*

*British Medical Journal, London (1993)*

*98 pages. Price £12.95*

Dermatology is a difficult subject. It not only requires the taking of a good history (which can be underrated by the inexperienced) but also an appreciation of the colours, textures, shapes and patterns associated with diseases of the skin. To add to the difficulty, the large standard texts are often impenetrable without at least a differential diagnosis. Thankfully, there are a number of introductory texts available to the non-specialist and this is one of the best I have read.

The first *ABC of dermatology* was published in 1988. Its aim was to use a few common key conditions as a basis for comparison with other skin diseases. For the general practitioner, this is an excellent approach as these key conditions such as eczema, psoriasis, acne and fungal infections are the ones seen most frequently in the surgery. This new edition contains more detailed information on malignant melanomas, the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and the acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS). There is also a short, but particularly informative, section on dermatological prescribing.

Buxton and his colleagues use a variety of techniques to convey a large amount of information in a relatively small space. These include line diagrams to show the usual distributions of rashes, and boxes containing summaries or important points. Best of all, this book contains many colour photographs. Though they are small, the vast majority are clear and easily interpreted. The accompanying text is concise and yet retains ample detail.

I will keep my copy within arm's reach in the surgery.

JAMES MAITLAND

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#### Royal College of Physicians of London

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