



EDUCATING THE FUTURE GP

The course organizer's handbook

Patrick McEvoy

Radcliffe Medical Press, Oxford (1993)

185 pages. Price £25.00

This excellent book in which the author discusses the role of an influential group of educators, despite their lack of a job description, is long overdue. The title may suggest that only course organizers will benefit by reading it but in fact it will be of benefit to anyone with an interest in general practitioner education. However, anyone considering applying for the post of course organizer should read the opening chapters to prepare them for their interview.

The author has done some exploratory research and is able to provide a degree of insight from others. This is a thoughtful book, written in a clear and witty style and it deserves a wide readership. A reference list accompanies each leading section but the references would be better positioned with the index at the end of the book.

It is appropriate that time should be spent discussing the educational philosophy of the way we educate our successors. Trainees need to be attracted to our discipline once more and books of this kind must be viewed positively. This book provides an educational framework on which general practitioner teaching can be based.

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DISEASE DIAGNOSIS AND DECISIONS

Graham W Bradley

John Wiley, Chichester (1993)

182 pages. Price £14.95

Dr Bradley's central theme in *Disease diagnosis and decisions* is that traditional teaching of medicine, based in the 19th century history of medical sciences such as pathology and bacteriology, ill equips doctors to work with the uncertainty of everyday medical practice. This leads not only to confusing and unacceptable variation in practice but to professional stress, over concern with litigation and hence 'defensive' medicine. As the author puts it in the preface, problem solving in medicine consists of making adequate decisions with inadequate information, a point that will be well recognized by general practitioners.

The book summarizes the state of play in four fields that may help in managing uncertainty: statistics and their use and limitations, evaluation of the specificity and sensitivity of tests,

computer aided diagnosis, and decision analysis. It contains the clearest explanations of Bayesian statistics and mathematical approaches to decision making that I have read and would be accessible to even the most innumerate of readers. The book has an extensive bibliography at the end of each chapter and is well referenced; thus it would make an excellent starting point for anyone interested in pursuing these subjects further.

The first three chapters contain a historical overview of the philosophy of medical practice and diagnosis from Imhotep to Pasteur and an analysis of how such 'modern' scientific theories as quantum mechanics and chaos theory could influence medical science. The idea of a paradigm shift such as that which took place from Newtonian to modern physics in the early 20th century is put forward as an explanation of much of the state of unease that characterizes current medical practice.

The author is clearly a broad-thinking sceptic, and as all good books should, *Disease diagnosis and decisions* challenges the basis of one's practice. I would recommend it to all MRCGP candidates and, given its compact and easy style, as a thought provoking read for all questioning doctors.

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STRESS MANAGEMENT IN GENERAL PRACTICE

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Royal College of General Practitioners

RCGP, London (1993)

42 pages. Price £9.00

At the same time as the effects of low morale and increased workload are felt by general practitioners, their patients are reporting increasing amounts of stress related illness associated with the day to day problems of modern living, including unemployment, threats of redundancy, and the rising levels of violence, especially in inner cities. The combination of the two is a potent mixture that can have a disabling effect on general practitioners' effectiveness and health.

It is timely that this report of a working party, made up of general practitioners, psychologists, social scientists and psychiatrists has been published. It brings together John Howie's important research findings which draw attention to the morale sapping effects on general practitioners of ever higher consultation rates, long hours and frequent interruptions, and recent research on stress and its relationship to illness. The report stresses that there are no easy answers but the message is that stress can be managed, its effects ameliorated and its symptoms coped with if the individual general practitioner so wishes.