



### **THE MRCGP EXAMINATION: A GUIDE FOR CANDIDATES AND TEACHERS**

*Richard Moore*

*Royal College of General Practitioners, London (1994)*

*183 pages. Price £16.50 (RCGP members £15.00)*

This book is about the MRCGP examination, but it is more than that. It is about general practice as a profession: its history, its aspirations and its success. Young doctors reading this book will find all they need to know about the examination as it is at present, but they will also have learned about the Royal College of General Practitioners — the motivation of the founding members and the continuing search for quality by the present members. These potential candidates will not only learn how to pass the examination, even more importantly they will learn why they should sit it.

The author is an experienced examiner who possesses wit, wisdom, vision and the ability to communicate with his audience. Reading this book is not a chore but a pleasure and potential candidates and their trainers will be considerably wiser by the finish. The practical advice on preparation and performance is well done, helpful and focused. The examination is revealed openly and honestly; doctors having read this book cannot say that they did not know what to expect or how to prepare. The book is also absolutely up to date with information on the latest developments in the MRCGP examination and in general practitioner assessment in general. In the final analysis it is the setting of the examination in the context of the history and future of general practice that makes this book special.

**PETER TATE**

*General practitioner, Abingdon, Oxfordshire*

### **HOW TO WRITE A PAPER**

*George M Hall (ed)*

*British Medical Journal Publishing Group, London (1994)*

*116 pages. Price £8.95*

Potential authors of primary care papers should not be deterred from reading this book by the fact that it is written largely by hospital specialists, many of whom are anaesthetists, or by its stated aim of giving simple, didactic advice on how to write a clinical paper. The biomedicine is leavened by contributions from the editor of the *British Medical Journal* and his publishing staff, and, in fewer than 100 pages, the authors succeed in summarizing a great deal of advice and instruction which experienced writers, as well as novices, should find interesting and stimulating.

When aspiring authors fail to follow a few simple guidelines, which can usually be found in a journal's instructions to authors, their papers are likely to produce antibodies in reviewers and sub-editors. Basic matters of presentation, structure and length, combined with an awareness of the interests of the journal and its readership, frequently determine the fate of manuscripts, irrespective of the quality of the research reported in them. Brilliance is unlikely to shine through a muddled, carelessly-produced paper. To this extent, the didactic instructions given in this book are entirely appropriate, and further chapters on writing letters, abstracts and case reports also contain much useful guidance aimed at getting journal submissions over at least the first hurdle in the editorial office.

This is a short book, and one of its secondary aims was to provide guidance for those whose first language is not English. It would, therefore, be wrong to carp about some omissions. However, the informality of the chapter on writing reviews is out of step with current thinking about the need for reviews to be structured, comprehensive and peer reviewed. Anyone thinking about writing a paper based on qualitative, as opposed to quantitative, research will find little to help them. The chapter on writing the methods section is located firmly in laboratory and clinical research, and important advice about the way in which other research methodology should be described, such as the use and validation of questionnaires, is not mentioned. There are more extensive discussions of style in other texts, but the admirably concise chapter in this book is as good a starting point as any.

This is not a book for everyone, but anyone starting to write papers for publication and abstracts for meetings will, I believe, find themselves repeatedly dipping into this unaffected book as a source of clear and wise guidance.

**ROGER JONES**

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### **THE TRAINEE'S COMPANION TO GENERAL PRACTICE**

*Joe Rosenthal, Jeanette Naish and Margaret Lloyd (eds)*

*Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh (1994)*

*301 pages. Price £19.95*

This book has seven main chapters, three from the three editors lecturing in general practice in London medical schools and additional contributions from Stephen Brant, a general practitioner trainer, Chris Donovan and Richard Savage course organizers, and from John Horder, past president of the Royal