



EYE EMERGENCIES: DIAGNOSIS AND MANAGEMENT

Lennox A Webb

Butterworth Heinemann, Oxford (1995)

200 pages. Price £15.99

This book provides accurate and common sense management for all common eye emergencies. It is conveniently pocket sized, and is simple to use. Readers will find the chapters on red eye, visual symptoms and postoperative eye problems particularly useful. The only chapter that lacks detail is the one that discusses eye examination and the use of equipment.

This book, however, reads as if eyes are not necessarily attached to bodies. There is no mention of the fact that individuals have emotions, fears, worries and a tendency for the unpredictable, or of how to deal with these.

The limits of allowable knowledge and territory between ophthalmologists and non-ophthalmologists are clearly defined, but from the ophthalmologist's perspective. By providing dogmatic guidance the guide may, inversely, perpetuate the lack of confidence in ophthalmology perceived by many junior doctors and general practitioners. There is little notion as to what should confidently be within the normal competence of the book's intended audience.

There is no doubt that this book will be a popular and useful acquisition for most hospital casualty departments and minor injuries units, and will quickly become well thumbed. Some general practitioners may find it useful as a quick guide, but those seeking to learn more about ophthalmology will be disappointed. It is what it claims to be — a common sense guide; a repair manual rather than an encyclopaedia.

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INFLUENCES ON COMPUTER USE IN GENERAL PRACTICE

Occasional paper 68

Michael Pringle, Paul Dixon, Roy Carr-Hill and

Audrey Ashworth

Royal College of General Practitioners, London (1995)

65 pages. Price £16.50 (RCGP members £15.00)

This is a thorough and comprehensive investigation of the state of general practice computing in the United Kingdom in 1991–92. The authors have used an extensive range of family health services authority and Department of Health data, as well as a postal survey of family health services authorities and general practice senior partners and interviews with family health

services authority computer officers. What emerges is a detailed account of computer use and perceived practices. It is striking how many different suppliers exist in the market; the great majority of suppliers are undercapitalized, having too few users to design new software quickly. The suppliers provide a service which generally rates poorly in terms of support and development. The majority of general practitioners surveyed expressed a need for advice on choosing a computer system. Barriers to successful computerization were reported to be cost, small list size and poor teamwork in the practice.

Family health services authorities were seen as having a major role in facilitating computer use through providing expertise and reimbursement for staff and training. The authors point out the deficiencies in the current inequitable and confusing reimbursement system for ongoing computer costs, recommending instead the application of a standard formula and greater forward planning by family health services authorities. Detailed examination of the data would suggest that computer use is not an end in itself but perhaps, like a training practice, is a marker for proactive, organized primary care.

The report's shortcomings are its age (three years is a long time in this field) and the lack of detailed comment on such national initiatives as family health services authority links, Read codes and data exchange standards. Further use could also have been made of the literature on medical decision making and computer use. One of the main barriers to effective computer use must be software designers' failure to address adequately the process of the general practice consultation. The report should, however, be of interest to family health services authorities and as background material for those thinking of computerizing their practice or of utilizing their existing systems more effectively.

BRENDAN C DELANEY

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DIABETES IN THE REAL WORLD

Charles Fox and Anthony Pickering

Class Publishing, London (1995)

280 pages. Price £19.95

This is a rather different book from the usual textbooks on diabetes. The authors, a general practitioner and a consultant physician, both with a special interest in diabetes, have largely succeeded in relating the mass of advice and evidence about diabetes management to real life clinical situations. The book is targeted at less experienced practitioners and practice nurses involved in the management of diabetes in general practice. It does, however, have much to offer the more experienced. The

text neatly overcomes the problem of differentiating between definite advice (given in the form of 'commandments') and conjecture. It is possible to take issue with some of these commandments, such as, 'always use diet first in [non-insulin dependent diabetes mellitus]', but on the whole there is little to argue about in this respect.

The book does not attempt to compete with established textbooks and, although major trials (such as the diabetes care and complications trial) are explained in detail, no references are given. Many of the clinical scenarios are enlivened by imaginary correspondence between the general practitioner and the consultant. For me this is the weakest part of the book, as the letters are extremely long and unlike any referral letters I have ever sent or received. The style is light, making for easy reading but this is both an advantage and a disadvantage. It is not a book that I would read several times or use for reference, even though the index is comprehensive.

In spite of these minor criticisms, Fox and Pickering have produced a useful addition to the literature on diabetes and they are to be congratulated on taking a fresh approach.

A J S WHITE

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Suffolk*

MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES IN PRIMARY CARE: A PRACTICAL GUIDE

*Elizabeth Armstrong
Macmillan Press, Basingstoke (1995)
143 pages. Price £10.00*

The author of this book on mental health issues is a nurse who has wide experience of working in primary care as a district nurse, health visitor and, from 1991, as facilitator in a mental health facilitator project which involved working with six general practices in inner London. The issues discussed are highly relevant because mental illness is a key area in the government's 'health of the nation' document (1992). The final chapter of the book is on 'meeting the targets'.

Although not a textbook, simple definitions are given which clarify the issues under discussion. Up-to-date information is clearly presented and references are all gathered in a section at the end of the book. The advice given suggests realistic and practical ways of making better use of existing resources, within both the primary care team and specialist mental health services. It is therefore likely to be widely replicable, unlike models that rely on highly trained mental health professionals being attached to general practices.

It is evident that the author is a meticulous researcher. She has also put the conclusions of her research into practice. Her inner city practice experience shows through in her highlighting of the needs of ethnic minorities.

As a psychiatrist with experience of working in primary care I approached this book with some scepticism. I read it, however, with increasing interest and enthusiasm. I shall be re-reading it and hopefully persuading others to help me put the proposals into practice locally.

JUDITH M BURGESS

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STUDY DAY ON SPORT & HEALTH: FITNESS FOR OVER 50s 29 November 1995

This study day, organised in association with the Sports Council, will examine the role of physical activity in the health of people over fifty. The programme considers both the physiological and the sociological factors involved in promoting physical exercise as a method of health care, and includes presentations on schemes which have been established to enable GPs to "prescribe" exercise for patients.

All members of the primary health care team are welcome to attend.

Delegate fee £55.00 (incl of VAT). PGEA applied for.

For further details please contact: RCGP Courses, 14 Princes Gate, Hyde Park, London SW7 1PU.
Tel: 0171 823 9703 Fax: 0171 225 3047.

Annual Symposium RESEARCH IN GENERAL PRACTICE Regents College, Regent's Park, London NW1 Thursday 16 November 1995

This year's Symposium seeks to raise the profile of research in general practice, covering the whole spectrum of research from simple projects right through to work forming the basis of an MD thesis. Plenary Speakers include Professor Sir Michael Peckham, Director of Research & Development at the Department of Health, and Professor Andrew Haines, Director of Research & Development, North Thames Regional Health Authority.

The programme will consist of academic presentations on new research as well as teaching sessions on research methods. **Topics include:**

- Doing an MD
- Research General Practices
- Qualitative and quantitative research
- How to get published
- How to get help

Whether you are thinking about undertaking research within general practice, or are an experienced researcher, this conference will have something for you.

Delegate fee (inclusive of VAT) £60.00 including lunch and refreshments. PGEA and Section 63 approved.

For further details please contact:

RCGP Courses & Conference Unit, 14 Princes Gate, Hyde Park, London SW7 1PU. Tel: 0171 823 9703 Fax: 0171 225 3047

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