



BEDSIDE MANNERS: AN ANTHOLOGY OF MEDICAL WIT AND WISDOM

John Ballantyne

Virgin Publishing, London (1995)

266 pages. Price £9.99

This is an excellent and interesting collection of writings about medicine, many of which have been written by famous literary doctors. The anthology is wide ranging, covering subjects as diverse as how doctors should dress and the death of Chekhov.

Much of the book is given up to the patient's view of doctors and should perhaps come with a warning that it may offend those in the medical profession who suffer from chronic pomposity. Repeatedly doctors are portrayed as, at worst, 'money grabbing' and jealous of true talent among their peers and, at best, as kindly but ineffectual souls. Despite the (probably justified) iconoclasm of writers such as G B Shaw we are left with the feeling that, overall, doctors do more good than harm.

The book gives excellent insights into how it feels to be a patient, particularly when facing bureaucracy or medical aloofness. The sections on cancer and deafness are particularly good, with extracts from Solzhenitsyn's *Cancer ward* and a beautiful story by Eudora Welty about the delight of a young deaf boy who, for the first time in his life, could 'see' his words as his breath froze on a winter's day.

This is a book which is easy to read either in one go or, as the title suggests, in snippets at bedtime. It would be a shame, however, to read some of these gems while half asleep. *Bedside manners* would make a very pleasant Christmas gift.

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TRAVEL-ASSOCIATED DISEASE

Gordon G Cook (ed)

Royal College of Physicians, London (1995)

179 pages. Price £15.00

The origin of this book was a day conference organized by the Royal College of Physicians in June 1994. Every general practitioner has to be interested in travel medicine since many patients will be seen by the general practitioner before going to or on returning from other countries. To evaluate this book I chose three current problems in travel medicine.

Precisely which travellers should be given hepatitis B vaccination? After 10 minutes' searching I discovered this World Health Organization recommendation: 'extended or frequent

travel to countries of high endemicity'. This was despite 11 pages being specifically devoted to the prevention and control of hepatitis B infection, and illustrates the drawback of this kind of compilation. It was never intended to address the needs of the general practitioner requiring succinct advice, hence it adds nothing to what most of us would have gleaned anyway.

What can general practitioners contribute to the prevention of malaria? This chapter makes interesting reading and from it I learnt that travellers to Turkey have had only four of the 11 319 cases of malaria imported into the United Kingdom in the last six years. It is always important to stress measures to minimize mosquito bites. Most fatal cases of malaria are associated with no or inadequate prophylaxis. Therefore we must stress compliance with prophylactic regimens rather than merely searching for the correct prophylactic drug (which is often a matter for compromise anyway).

Finally, what advice should be given to travellers with coronary heart disease? Despite several repetitions of the information that coronary heart disease is much more likely than infections to cause the death of an older person while abroad, we are given no guidance about the dangers of heat exhaustion or high altitude. One useful tip did emerge: in future when asked about the dangers of travel, my response will be that alcohol kills more travellers than plague, ebola virus and every other scare put together.

In summary: an interesting update for those with a special interest in travel medicine, but most general practitioners should look elsewhere for handy advice.

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HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK: GUIDANCE FOR GENERAL PRACTITIONERS

RCGP practice organization series

Richard Moore and Stephen Moore

Royal College of General Practitioners, London (1995)

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

I cannot speak more highly of this excellent book than to say that in my absence at the WONCA conference in Hong Kong, my practice manager when dutifully sorting my post spotted it, read it at once and asked me, after review, if she could keep it.

Any general practice with more than five employees after 1 January 1993 that fails to comply with health and safety at work regulations can be fined up to £5000 with a further £100 per day as long as there is a failure to comply with these regulations.