

pack (*Aggression and violence in general practice*, by Harris and colleagues) contains material for two half-days of postgraduate education allowance for a group of 10 participants.

Descriptions of procedures for use in a crisis are only useful if practised and remembered. General practitioners do have a training need for management of violent patients, and books like this one are a good start although they are no substitute for careful training.

STEFAN CEMBROWICZ  
*General practitioner, Bristol*

### TACKLING INEQUALITIES IN HEALTH: AN AGENDA FOR ACTION

*Michaela Benzeval, Ken Judge and Margaret Whitehead (eds)*  
*King's Fund Centre, London (1995)*  
*166 pages. Price £14.95*

The evidence is now overwhelming. People living in disadvantaged socioeconomic circumstances have more illnesses, more disability and shorter lives than those who live in more affluent circumstances. General practitioners working in deprived areas see this in their surgeries every day. Poor housing, poverty, inadequate education and unemployment feed each other and, in the process, undermine health and blight lives. The health of the nation is only as good as that of its poorest citizens.

It is a matter of profound injustice that a person's health should be undermined by social circumstances which are beyond his or her control. This timely book seeks to move beyond the

fact of this injustice and to develop an agenda for action. Practical, affordable ways of reducing inequalities in health are described, but the whole text is underwritten by a recognition that the greatest challenge is to generate the political will necessary to tackle the injustice and bring about real change.

Interventions are proposed at four different levels aimed at strengthening individuals, strengthening communities, improving access to essential facilities and services, and encouraging macroeconomic and cultural change. Housing, family poverty, smoking and the linked issues of education, unemployment and child care are each discussed in detail, giving tangible examples of the extent of the inequalities and how much could be done to redress them. In a discussion of the role of the National Health Service it is acknowledged that levels of well-being and life expectancy are more closely related to the availability of adequate social security, housing, employment and education than to health care. However, the book goes on to raise the question of credibility, pointing out that if the health sector is not concerned with inequalities in health, other sectors can hardly be expected to take the issue of inequality seriously. The NHS has a responsibility to take the lead and to promote equity across the whole range of public policies that have an impact on health.

In the foreword to this book, after reiterating the wide and increasing social differentials in health, Sir Donald Acheson writes: 'Today the question is not whether these facts are valid, but who cares and what can be done about them'. This is an important debate to which this book makes a major contribution.

IONA HEATH  
*General practitioner, Kentish Town, London*

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