



A DOCTOR'S LIFE

Dr R P Cookson

New Millenium 1996 (Second edition)

353 pages, price £8.95

ISBN 185845056X

This is the story of a dedicated general practitioner (GP) who qualified from Edinburgh in January 1943; his final examinations were taken six months early in order to release hospital doctors for war service. Dr Cookson was then appointed to the sole residency at the 100-bed Arbroath General Hospital where, in peacetime, there had been two resident doctors. In spite of visits by consultants and local GPs who visited their own patients, it was indeed a baptism of fire, as in addition to the other duties he was required to administer all the anaesthetics.

After six months at the hospital, Dr Cookson served in the army in North Africa, and on demobilization returned to Arbroath Hospital for a further six months before looking for an opening in general practice.

Eventually he settled in a three-man private practice in the small seaside town of Bridlington. There he had access to local hospitals and also visited villages up to seven miles away. He enjoyed this challenge as he had enjoyed all the others, in spite of the chaos involved in the transfer to the National Health Service in 1948.

In 1975, the practice moved from its three separate surgeries to a new health centre where Dr Cookson remained until he retired in 1982.

Most of this detailed and interesting saga deals with his life up to the 1960s and will interest those doctors who qualified during the war or soon after. Younger GPs, in particular, should read this narrative to gain some detailed knowledge of the massive changes which affected general practice in the early post-war era.

DENIS CRADDOCK

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ABC OF MEDICAL COMPUTING

N Lee and A Millman

BMJ Publishing Group 1996

Price £17.95

This is an excellent book that is suitable not only for beginners in information technology, but for many of us who want to fill in the gaps in our experience. There is inevitably much detail that is not

particular to medicine, but the book is rightly aimed at both primary and secondary care. The chapters relating to general practice are concise and informative and detailed enough for a book of this kind. A deeper understanding would be gained from books on specific subjects such as audit and practice management, and from becoming familiar with the major general practice computer systems. Although the book is broadly comprehensive, one subject not addressed is how to progress after having read it. Although some of the chapters attempt to take a step-by-step approach, readers will learn more of what can be done rather than how it is done. Help will still be required and there could be more advice on courses, further reading and the best approach to gaining practical experience.

The book is attractively presented in A4 size with the text in one column and relevant illustrations or information boxes at the same level in the adjacent column. The excellent glossary and index are necessary because terms are introduced before being explained in the text.

The authors have produced a very up-to-date and factual book. It is interesting to see how, in doing so, they have moved beyond simply giving readers an understanding of how IT works and the wonder of it all.

FREDERICK DIFFORD

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JOINT AND SOFT TISSUE INJECTION - INJECTING WITH CONFIDENCE

Trevor Silver

Radcliffe Medical Press 1996

84 pages, price £19.95

ISBN 1857751434

Whether we inject a lot or a little, reminders of the anatomy and technical knowledge required to inject safely and accurately are invaluable. This book has very clear photographs showing each technique, with excellent accompanying drawings demonstrating the underlying anatomical landmarks. These are ideal for encouraging confidence in novice injectors. The adjacent text concisely describes the diagnosis and approaches to each injection, and often includes some pearls of practical knowledge through which Silver's experience of the subject shines.

In the first two chapters, the author covers the general principles and medico-legal aspects of joint injections concisely

but thoroughly. There are chapters on seven anatomical areas covering the most commonly performed injections.

Unfortunately, the author is let down by sloppy editing. The first chapter is oddly entitled 'Incidence', instead of something like 'General principles'. The style is uneven, jumping from the personal to the impersonal, and one diagram appears to demonstrate the injection of 10 mls of fluid into the ischial gluteal bursa rather than 2 mls as correctly stated in the text. There are other places where sub-headings and lists would have improved the accessibility of the information.

It was disappointing to see so few references. Much of what we do in general practice is empirical, and success rates through injection techniques are probably not as great as might be thought. Despite the lack of good control trials in this area, a few pointers towards the relevant literature would have enhanced this book.

STEPHEN MILLER

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MAKING SENSE OF A PRIMARY CARE HEALTH SERVICE

*Peter Littlejohns and Christina Victor (eds)
Radcliffe Medical Press 1996
100 pages, price £16.50
ISBN 1857750489*

This book, according to one of its editors, 'deals with the overall concept of the policy [that of the primary care-led service] and its implementation through the eyes of the general practitioners and public health physicians...' As such, its readership will probably tend to be small, and limited to these groups. This is a pity because it does little to help the other puzzled folk who want to know where this policy is going.

In the book, a series of authors seek to explore and explain various aspects of the topic from defining the policy to the impact of the new health authorities. Many interesting and difficult subjects (for example, maintaining quality, commissioning and fundholding) get only a brief treatment. In many cases (but less so in the chapter on commissioning) the treatment tends to be theoretical and encouraging with too few real examples.

The chapter on health-needs assessment makes some interesting points and seems almost, to this reader at least, to be suggesting that health statisticians should lead the service. As a consequence, the book poses the question as to what can the GP say about local practice variations that would lead the service in non-approved statistical directions.

All in all, this is a book packed with ideas, theories and proposals, but with little by way of proof of achievement — after all, in a sense, GPs have always led the service. If, dear general practitioner, you have time to spare (and which of you does?) and can ration yourself to a steady reading and not a quick-fire rush through it, then it is worth reading — perhaps with a large container of salt by your side.

ARTHUR J WILLCOCKS

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University of Nottingham*

MEDICAL RECORDS IN PRACTICE

*B Lervy (ed)
RCGP Publications 1996
Price £20.00
ISBN 0850842247*

This publication from the Royal College of General Practitioners' Practice Organization Series aims to provide guidelines for all members of the primary health care team at a time when all National Health Service bodies have been asked to ensure that their arrangements for handling patient information conform with the Department of Health guidelines. The topics covered range from the preparation and use of medical records, both manual and computerized, to the current legal aspects including standards, confidentiality and patient access.

The chapters vary in style from a résumé of statutory requirements, and reviews of research-based recommendations, to original papers by individual practitioners. There are good expositions of the unresolved dilemmas with reference to the clinical and medico-legal aspects of manual versus computer records, but there are no fresh insights, conclusions or recommendations regarding the way forward.

The format, with its multiple contributors, makes this book more suitable as a reference volume in the practice library, where members of the practice team, including GP registrars, may benefit from reading individual sections of the text to improve or update their knowledge of current trends and guidelines for medical records in primary care.

R FAIRLEY

General practitioner, Health Centre, Bridge of Allen

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