



BOOK AND VIDEO REVIEW

SURVIVAL SKILLS FOR GPs

A distance-learning educational pack

Dr Ruth Chambers

Royal College of General Practitioners GP Stress Fellowship, London (1996)

Two modules including: VHS video; audio cassettes; work book; answer book

Price £85 each; £155 for the set of two

Stress is prevalent in general practice today and is a serious concern for many general practitioners (GPs). Although there has been much written about the stressed GP, little in the way of educational material has been made available to help alleviate the problem.

This distance-learning package consists of two modules with the format being a mixture of video, audio, work books and answer books that makes the package enjoyable to use. The first module is entitled 'Stress alert' and is concerned with the identification of stressors, how frequently they occur and the effect they have on our colleagues, patients, families and ourselves, the GP. Personal awareness of the problem is handled well and the process of looking for solutions begins with the development of an action plan.

The second module, 'Options and solutions for reducing stress', is concerned with doing something about the stress. This is handled either by improving coping mechanisms or by reducing stressors by preventing, reducing or learning to cope with stress. New skills such as stress management and communication are developed and linked to methods of improving personal self-esteem. The whole approach is directed towards the individual. Numerous audits and questionnaires help the user to put the theory into practice.

I would strongly recommend this package for those who want to tackle this important problem and change their lives.

PETER ORTON

Hatfield Health Authority, Essex

SELF-ASSESSMENT IN ACCIDENT AND EMERGENCY MEDICINE

Derek Burke, Ian Greaves and Philip Hormbrey

Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford (1996)

Price £15.99

ISBN 0750622156

I would not like to have a book reviewed by me. All those years of forced reading for undergraduate and postgraduate examinations have made me cynical and petulant where textbooks are concerned — especially those made up of examination-type questions. But this book was different. I took it miserably up to bed and then enjoyed it for nearly two hours. I was pleased when I got the answers right and learned a lot when I was wrong.

As its title suggests, 'Self-assessment in accident and emergency medicine' is made up of a series of questions and answers that are broadly based on the work of what used to be called a casualty department. There are four main sections: multiple choice questions, case histories, data interpretation exercises and clinical picture questions. All are informative and well written. (I enjoyed the clinical pictures the least as I always find that pictures in books are different from the real thing.) The subjects covered are varied and comprehensive — the authors have managed to include a huge amount of the growing body of knowledge that is needed by all doctors who deal with emergencies. The answers given are informative and practical and are never irrelevant or obsessed with minutiae.

It is impossible not to learn something from this book. Reviewers are allowed to either keep or return the books that they review. I shall certainly be keeping this one and, moreover, buying another copy for my department.

CHRISTOPHER MOULTON

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THE GP CONSULTATION: A REGISTRAR'S GUIDE

Peter G Livesey

Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford (1996)

Price £14.99

ISBN 0750631309

The author of this book comes with an impressive pedigree, being a trainer and course organizer and past associate regional adviser for South East Thames, and, if one has a feeling of déjà vu when reading it, the explanation is that it is not a new book at all, but a revision of a book published in 1986 and given a new title. The rave reviews describing the original publication (*Partners in care*) were no doubt justified, but times have changed and general practice has tried to keep pace, especially in teaching. Since the publication of the original book, compulsory vocational training has been introduced, there has been a new contract, and 'reforms' imposed on the profession that have changed the face of traditional general practice enormously. Registrars, as they are now called, have to learn about fundholding and other commissioning processes, a subject on which no guidance is given.

When the original book was published, pioneering ideas in general practice were being formalized and the teaching of the Balints spawned many new ideas. It was recognized that training for hospital medicine, which was the usual way students (both under- and postgraduate) were trained, was not sufficient, and the recognition that 'listening to the patient' would provide clues as to the real reason for the consultation advanced the understanding of the trainee enormously. But this philosophy, together with many other 'discoveries' of the era, are now embodied in training; instead of

providing exciting new vistas, the book merely revisits the past. Out of approximately 180 references, only four refer to the 1990s, one of which is a personal communication. Who nowadays accepts five minutes as the average time of a consultation? And what sort of message is being conveyed when an example of a morning's surgery quotes three minutes for a coil check and four minutes for an ear syringing?

This new edition has a new chapter on video assessment, now essential for the registrar, and is clearly written and useful; but, as for the rest, I think it would have been more honest to call it a revision and keep the original title than to try to pass it off as a new book.

JAMES CARNE

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RELATING TO RELATIVES

*Thurstan Brewin and Margaret Sparshott
Radcliffe Medical Press, Oxford and New York (1996)
Price £13.50
ISBN 1857750810*

The longer one is qualified, the more one becomes aware of the absolute centrality of communicating and empathizing with patients and relatives, and the more one realizes how unskilled, untutored and often insensitive most of us are. How easy it is to comfort ourselves by noting how much more inept our colleagues are!

This small book makes for compelling, uncomfortable reading. It is not yet another recipe book, nor a 'how to do it' primer, nor a condensation of major reference texts. It is the distillation of a lifetime's experience in cancer medicine, full of sensitive 'uncommon' sense. As should always be the case, the art of medicine is blended with the science, and kindly humanity (and much humour) with undoubted pragmatism — all written in a relaxed, chatty manner by a natural raconteur.

This book richly deserves the recommendation, sometimes loosely offered, but here well merited, of 'essential reading for every doctor'.

DEREK DOYLE

Retired consultant in palliative medicine

CANCER AND THE ADOLESCENT

*Peter Selby and Clifford Bailey (Eds)
BMJ Publishing Group, London (1996)
Price £29.95
ISBN 0727908936*

This book is a compilation of papers presented to the First International Conference on Cancer and the Adolescent in 1994. The contents of the book illustrate the fact that adolescents with cancer are taken up into a tertiary level of medical care that frequently removes them from contact with their general practitioner (GP). Due regard is paid to the effects of diagnosis and treatment on the quality of life and the psyche of the adolescent, but there is no contribution from a primary care perspective. This is unfortunate, as the encouraging facts are that survival of childhood cancer has dramatically improved over the past 50 years, and by the year 2000 around 1 in 1000 young adults will be a survivor of childhood cancer. Inevitably, GPs will be coming into contact with these survivors and, as the book demonstrates, this group of patients suffer late effects of treatment — psychosocial, endocrine and growth effects, systems toxicity, second neoplasms and neuro-psychological effects. The text provides useful guidance on the problems that may be encountered during and after treatment.

Follow-up questions that might usefully be asked of such patients involve inquiring about persistent conditioned responses (in particular, nausea and vomiting), depression, sexual problems and relationship difficulties.

This book is a must for the specialist, but, having had adolescent patients with a cancer diagnosis, I found it fascinating and helpful reading.

D A SEAMARK

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THE PREVENTION OF MENTAL ILLNESS IN PRIMARY CARE

*Tony Kendrick, André Tylee and Paul Freeling (Eds)
Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (1996)
398 pages
ISBN 0251576482*

This book provides a galaxy of information about all aspects of mental illness relevant to general practice. It lives up to its promise of giving practical advice which 'can readily be utilized in the primary care setting'.

The book is in three parts entitled 'At risk groups', 'Early detection in primary care', and 'Limiting disability and preventing relapse'. In total there are 21 chapters written by different authors. Although most of the chapters fit in well with each part, I wasn't quite sure that 'counselling' was appropriate in Part 1, which is about 'at risk' groups.

As in any other multi-author book, some chapters are better than others, and some border on excellence. In the latter group I include the chapter on postnatal depression, bereavement, the secondary prevention of depression, and organizing continuing care of the long-term mentally ill in general practice. Unfortunately, I wasn't too impressed by the chapter on mental illness among ethnic groups, and that was despite 10 pages of references at the end — an overkill if ever there was one.

The chapter dealing with patients with learning difficulties comes to the inevitable conclusion that the primary care team has a unique role in managing the physical, mental and social care of the patient, and referring when necessary. The chapter also ends with a marvellous summary of all the important points.

Sadly, one or two chapters did fall into the trap of excessive use of jargon. For instance, in an otherwise excellent chapter on the prevention of anxiety disorder, I was mesmerized by a passage that began: 'The most common of the cognitive distortions are, catastrophizing, dichotomizing...'

There are also one or two interesting comments that are probably not too far from the truth; for example, on early detection of psychosis it is alleged that the health planners base their marvellous ideas on the simple premise that 'all neurotics are dealt with by their GP and all psychotics by hospitals'!

The other intriguing suggestion in the chapter on tertiary prevention in depression is that cognitive therapy should be offered by the members of the primary care team. I doubt whether the author fully appreciates the pressures of time and resources in general practice.

In summary, this is a good book on mental illness, which covers not only prevention, but also the overall management of many common conditions in the community. It deserves a place in any practice library.

JAMIE BAHRAMI

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