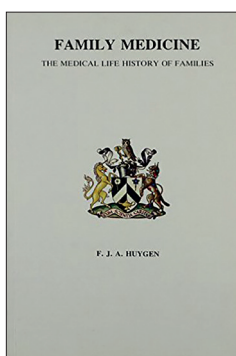


Out of Hours Books

Family Medicine: The Medical Life History of Families FJA Huygen

First published by Dekker and Van de Vegt, Nijmegen, the Netherlands, 1978. Republished by the Exeter Publications office of the Royal College of General Practitioners, 1990, with the permission of the publisher, 978-0850841473



WEAVING THROUGH GENERATIONS

My parents' surgery was in an extension of our home. As children, we answered the phone, gave out prescriptions at the front door when the surgery was closed, and often helped with filing letters or doing other paperwork during school holidays. Growing up, we came to know the patients of the practice and saw how health and sickness weaved through generations.

So, when I first read *Family Medicine: The Medical Life History of Families* by Frans Huygen, I almost recognised these patients, though from a different country and a very different culture. Describing his patients in a way that we probably could not do now, he shared their personal lives, the family dynamics, how illness repeated in mothers and daughters, the impact of caring for patients at home, and the relationships that are so much a part of family medicine. However, it was his charts and diagrams recording sickness through families that were groundbreaking in a time long before electronic records; his deep understanding of psychological pathology predated our insights into depression; and his drawings illustrating the book, and a further sketchbook *Herinneringen aan Lent*, capture the burden of illness more acutely than any textbook.

Frans was the grandfather of scholarly general practice in the Netherlands who

“... his deep understanding of psychological pathology predated our insights into depression ... and his drawings ... capture the burden of illness more acutely than any textbook.”

inspired generations of academics, a founder member of the Dutch College of General Practice (Nederlands Huisartsen Genootschap), Founding Chair of General Practice in Nijmegen, and an immensely influential figure worldwide but, at that time, I had only a vague understanding of his stature and a mental picture of him through his insights as a GP. Some years later, when visiting Nijmegen, I naïvely asked Chris van Weel if I could meet Frans.

By now long retired he first seemed quite reserved, almost severe and a little distant — unsurprising when I look back. There were 40 years between us — he was an academic colossus and I was an upstart.

Frans took me on a tour of the practice in Lent, and we stopped outside the homes of patients in the book. He showed me where he did the drawings, introduced me to some of the families featuring in the narrative, visited the flower growers in the area, and he showed me where he practised. We stopped the car and viewed the bridge at Nijmegen from many different angles and had lunch overlooking the bridge, where he recounted its importance during the war and its personal significance to him. We spent the evening in the garden of his home in Lent beside the pond and its water lilies that he often painted, and we sat chatting in his study where he wrote so much of his work, while he reflected on his life and achievements.

Many of his paintings hang in our home and remind me of the privilege of that friendship and his subsequent visit to Ireland. His landscapes almost all feature Nijmegen bridge, even in the far distance, and are a constant reminder of a war that

stayed in his lifetime memory. When my eye is drawn to a particular painting of his study, I can still feel the warm evening air flowing through the open door to his garden at the end of that wonderful day when he brought the book to life.

I sometimes take the book down off the bookshelf and, when browsing through his patients' stories and his illustrations of their lives, I am reminded that one of the most influential of our general practice academic pioneers was a true family doctor who was familiar with every line etched on the faces of his patients.

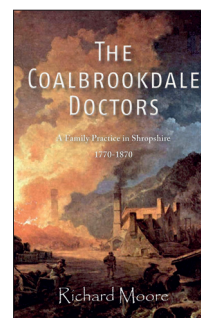
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The Coalbrookdale Doctors: A Family Practice in Shropshire, 1770–1870 Richard Moore

YouCaxton Publications, 2014, PB, 198pp, £12.99, 978-1909644304



THE EVOLUTION OF GENERAL PRACTICE

Coalbrookdale is a small village in Shropshire that contributed to the development of the manufacturing industry through production of iron ore and was home to the famous industrialist Abraham Darby. Richard Moore takes a fascinating look at the life and work of three generations of doctors from the same family who lived and worked in Coalbrookdale between 1770 and 1870. The village, and the practice

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of medicine, changed beyond recognition during these 100 years.

As with all communities, the residents of Coalbrookdale needed doctors. The story explores the evolution of the discipline that we now recognise as general practice but which started from humble beginnings with apothecaries selling medicines to treat undiagnosed ailments. Their medical education initially involved an apprenticeship and evidence-based medicine simply did not exist.

There are terrifying accounts of cross-infection, management of obstructed labour, and the use of dubious therapies such as blood-letting. Today we read about these with horror, but at the time they knew no better and were doing what they thought was best for their patients. As time passed, the need for this group of practitioners to have a more formal education, recognised qualifications, and ultimately a clear status within the medical profession became apparent.

The doctors lived within the community of Coalbrookdale, practising from the family home, and clearly felt a loyalty to and responsibility for the population they served. They relied on payment from the poor and sick, which was not guaranteed, and the workload was immense with patients able to call day or night. The excessive workload led successive generations of doctors to be physically and mentally exhausted.

The period described in the book ends 150 years ago, a long time perhaps, although the importance of evidence-based practice, the need for a sound medical education, the value of universal health care, and the challenge of physician burnout is as relevant today as it was in Coalbrookdale all those years ago.

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Nothing but Grass

Will Cohu

Chatto & Windus, 2015, HB, 416pp, £16.99, 978-0701187859



FROM DOGGING TO DEMENTIA

Vignettes of brutality pepper Will Cohu's first novel, set in the Lincolnshire Wolds. An attempted hanging, a graphic animal slaughter, and the drawn-out death of a young mother encircle the central event — the murder and burial of a fellow labourer by Norman Tanner, who utilises his spade for both purposes. At the time the crime seems motiveless, perhaps even unintended (Norman's frigid reaction is bizarre and unfathomable) but nevertheless in the years to come the dead man's sphere expands and begins to envelop its perpetrator.

Cohu paints a jumbled picture of life in the imaginary town of Ranby, ambitiously tackling a century of events spanning the First World War and the 2007–2008 financial crash, and scooping up characters involved in and affected by everything from dogging to dementia. There is an inherent blackness to the novel; an equally bleak eye is cast over family life (with its generous smatterings of abusive teenagers and extramarital affairs) and society in general (rife with racism, sexism, and substance abuse). Neither do the characters demonstrate much moral fortitude, and, although the absence of a protagonist is a little unnerving, it does conjure up an interesting bitterness to the reader.

It's not without its frustrations: the more pedantic among us might legitimately object to the contrived dialogue between the younger characters (extending to some uncomfortable text transcripts) and the flagrant disregard for confidentiality displayed by the local GP! The snaking storylines are so scattered that at times they

seem to slither away altogether, and the reader is left flicking through previous pages in the vain hope of distinguishing 'Joe' from 'Pete' — and what's the connection with Emily again? As a result certain characters feel flimsy, and we are left with a sense of never really having got under anyone's skin.

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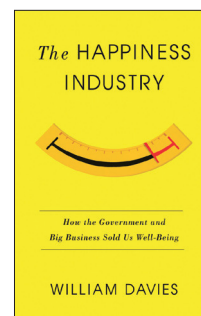
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The Happiness Industry: How the Government and Big Business Sold Us Well-Being

William Davies

Verso, 2015, HB, 320pp, £13.59, 978-1781688458



THE SNARE OF HAPPINESS

We live in an era of unprecedented progress in the study of emotions and, in particular, of happiness. You might assume that this is a good thing but this fascinating book may well persuade you otherwise.

For the last 200 years the study of happiness, or 'well-being' as it has come to be known, has been inextricably linked to the fields of economics and marketing, which has led to some studies, experiments, and outcomes of breath-taking cynicism. Davies tells us that, perhaps unsurprisingly, research and thought in this area have not been directed towards improving the lives of individual people, but have rather been