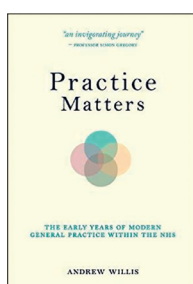


Life & Times Books

Practice Matters: the Early Years of Modern General Practice Within the NHS

Andrew Willis

Saigton Books, 2017, PB, 364pp, £12.99, 978-0995655515



GETTING BETTER ALL THE TIME

Two years after taking early retirement I suffer a recurring nightmare. I have agreed to do some locums, but remember that without GMC registration and MPS membership I cannot work as a doctor. I wake with a start, relieved. I offer to read this book. Why? Willis's career predated mine by a few years but covered many of the same years, and I seek both the context of an alternative view and, perhaps, some corroboration of my own.

Willis is an optimist, an enthusiast, an apologist. General practice was OK in his world, and getting better. He calls his book a memoir, but the real detail is in organisational history — both nationally and in his own practice. Anecdotes are sparse, personalities vague, conflicts — if any existed — carefully airbrushed out. There are no heartsink patients, partnership wrangles, difficult staff; even politicians receive very faint criticism.

Nevertheless, as I read of the innovations in his practice, I regret not having visited Northampton in 1993, when I was writing a series of articles for the *BMJ* on Enriching Careers in General Practice. Willis and his partners were quick to see the potential of collecting and organising information, whether in card index systems or computers. They improved their premises, recruited nursing staff to take on the routine tasks of CDM, developed a patient participation group, pioneered locality-based commissioning as an alternative to the fundholding system, and piloted computer networking and electronic

prescribing. I am delighted to share his memory of the cooperative pre-1990 NHS, in which — before the government bastardised the word 'choice' — GPs were free to refer to any hospital, anywhere. Willis allows a moment of nostalgia for 'the day of the enthusiastic amateur', the 'organised curiosity' of cottage epidemiology, before his eyes light up in response to the power of universal practice computing in an era 'when no working GPs will remain who experienced the need to create paper systems themselves'.

Stuart Handysides,

Retired GP, Associate Editor, ProMED.

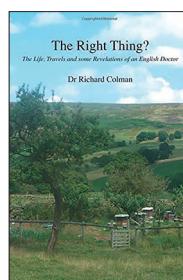
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The Right Thing? The Life, Travels and Some Revelations of an English Doctor Richard Colman

Createspace Independent Publishing Platform, 2nd edn, 2015, PB, 326pp, £10.20, 978-1517138240



A THORN IN THEIR SIDE

In Richard Colman's autobiography a varied and unconventional medical career is recounted. He has been truly bohemian in both his medical and personal life. In a career that offered him many crossroads, he seems always to have taken the route with the most challenging terrain. He steered a course through general practice, holistic and occupational medicine; battled the medical establishment from within and without; and still found time to travel widely and enjoy a fulfilling and successful family life. In this reader's view he answers his

own titular question in 300 enjoyable pages.

Aside from describing an interesting and varied life Colman's writing offers important insights into the sea change in medical regulation that the last 20 or so years have brought. He describes an initial skirmish with the GMC over advertising, when he perceived that organisation's veto on reasonable advertising unfairly impeded independent practitioners. He then recounts his time as a member of the GMC with a certain legal bravura. Through Good Medical Practice, the Bristol scandal, and revalidation he is challenging, contrary, and always interesting. These passages are among the most engaging and informative of the book. A man ready to report the President of the GMC to his own organisation is always going to be worth reading. Colman's reflective final chapters reveal too a man thoughtful and insightful about what he has passed through. His meditations on professionalism and consumerism are especially thought provoking. These chapters would serve well as a model of reflective writing to those currently in general practice training.

The book is not perfect. It is self-published and certain sections would have benefited from professional editing. In particular, he is not particularly revelatory on how his travels have influenced his personal and professional outlook. Occasional diary entries and letters are offered verbatim, adding little to the narrative. In conclusion, this is an interesting book from an unorthodox doctor. One can be certain that the events recounted will be viewed differently by others, not least some of those named in the book. However, as an honest account and a stimulating read, many GPs will enjoy it.

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