

Life & Times

Books

Dr Muller reminds us that:

'Despite being managed almost exclusively in general practice, existing research has been conducted in secondary care with patients with atypical disease activity. This study is the first to investigate PMR in the setting where it is diagnosed and managed and helps us understand the severity of symptoms and the impact on patients.'

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What a privilege it is to chair the RCGP RPY, and how relevant is the research that is conducted so well by the teams who have won our awards. I look forward to next year's call for papers and would encourage all GPs to look out for publications that have impacted on their clinical practice to think about nominating those papers for this award.

Carolyn Chew-Graham,

GP Principal, Manchester. Professor of General Practice Research, Keele University, Keele, Staffordshire.

E-mail: c.a.chew-graham@keele.ac.uk

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The Future of the Professions: How Technology Will Transform the Work of Human Experts

Richard Susskind and Daniel Susskind

Oxford University Press, 2015, HB, 364pp, £18.99, 978-0198713395



EXISTENTIAL ANGST IN A DIGITAL AGE

I think it is fair to say that the current state of general practice may leave a few of us gazing wistfully into our cornflakes, mulling over the future of our profession. For those of us without enough existential angst about where we are headed, then *The Future of the Professions* provides plenty more ammunition with a smattering of food for thought. Early in the book the co-authors unashamedly put doctors, lawyers, teachers, accountants, and other 'human experts' directly in their 'cross-hairs'. This 364-page volume predicts not only radical change in the work professionals do but also even portents their destruction, underpinned by details of how the work of professionals will largely be performed by increasingly intelligent computers. The publishers claim this book '*Urges readers to rethink the way that expertise is shared in society*' and '*Builds on 30 years of research and practical work*'.¹

The first section of the book in particular makes for uncomfortable reading as the various shortcomings of professional groups are laid bare in some detail. I think the most prominent of these is the accusation that doctors (and others) run a closed shop on knowledge and expertise that is fiercely guarded by elitist institutions.

As the book progresses from problems to solutions it becomes an easier read and signposts to cross-disciplinary innovations that had me reaching for the laptop to explore further. It was a revelation for me to discover that various top universities now offer free online courses called Massive

ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE

William Mackintosh

Coach and Horses Surgery, Carmarthenshire, SA33 4AA, UK.

E-mail: will_mackintosh@yahoo.co.uk

Open Online Courses (MOOCs). Just flicking through the selection from Harvard had me planning new tangents for my next appraisal year and gave me some new perspectives on GP training.

That said, the sections on medical 'advances' did not lead me towards a better understanding of how we might use technology in a way that allows us to help patients to have better deaths, for example. Or, furthermore, how those golden subtleties of communication in face-to-face consultations can be preserved through electronic alternatives.

Perhaps most powerfully the mere fact that I was reading the text on something as old-fashioned as paper failed to convince me to shred my stethoscope and head for the Apple Store.

William Mackintosh,

GP, Coach and Horses Surgery, Carmarthenshire. Chair, Royal College of General Practitioners, South West Wales Faculty, Wales.

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