Changing school health services. Eds: Brown P, Gordon P, Hughes J. (Pp 76; £8.50) London: Primary Health Care Group, King's Fund Centre, 1988.

This publication consists of papers on different aspects of a school health service. They arose from a series of workshops on school health services held at the King's Fund Centre in 1986. There are five sections: a summary of current debates on policy and practice in community child health services; two case studies which offer some clear directions on what to look for when assessing service quality; guidelines on reviewing and developing policies; an overview of organisation, statistics and performance indicators; and an up-to-date annotated bibliography.

The report, I feel, will be useful to doctors working in community paediatrics. It will help to clarify policies and sharpen up some of the more blurred aspects of school health. It casts valid, critical attention on current practice and highlights new developments which deserve wider implementation.

Whilst trying to iron out some basic issues in school health there are some dogmas which it still does not question. For example, it discusses the routine medical examination in very traditional terms rather than as a broad review of everything that has gone before. The report draws appropriate attention to new developments such as those of parent-held records, and old problems such as those of professional rivalry.

The role of the consultant community paediatrician is discussed. The model which they use is that originally put forward in the Court Report as a hospital paediatrician who spends 50% of his time within the community and who is the chairman of the district handicap team. The nature of posts in community paediatrics has developed widely from this model and many other patterns of post exist which do not involve a hospital paediatric commitment.

The report rightly stresses the professional development of the school nurse. However, it does not cast its critical eye on the role of doctors in the immunisation programme. It is certainly uneconomical to use doctors, as many health authorities do, as the agent for delivering immunisations. Many Third World countries have learnt long ago that this is not an economic use of doctors' time.

The reader could become confused with the section devoted to training. It implies that a three year general professional training would lead one to a consultant appointment in community paediatrics. This is clearly not the case but may be inferred from the information given in the report.

Outside of these criticisms, which are small, I found

the report very stimulating. I think it deserves to be read widely and discussed in every child health department.

Book reviews

L POLNAY

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Guide to clinical interpretation of data. Ed: Bert Spilker. (Pp 400, \$42) New York: Raven Press, 1986.

This remarkable book is part of that well known North American literary genre of self improvement manuals. The author is a clinical pharmacologist jointly employed in the pharmaceutical industry and in academic medicine. With this unusual background he has produced a comprehensive and practical guide to the interpretation of clinical data that contains over 200 tables, figures, flow charts and checklists. Some flavour of these can be obtained from the table listing seven factors associated with a surgeon's expertise which influence results. This separately lists his training, his experience, his preference and the presence of a member of the surgical review committee! The author draws heavily from the recent texts on clinical epidemiology produced by Feinstein *et al*, Fletcher *et al*, and Sackett *et al*.

Unfortunately the book tends to oscillate between absurd detail and statements which beg the question, such as the author's opening definition of abnormality as being something not characteristic of normal. Nowhere could I find any subsequent definition or discussion of what is normal. Much of the book is concerned with the interpretation of clinical pharmacological studies and therefore the book may be of value to researchers in this area with little experience of human data. Clinicians and other researchers interested in data interpretation would be better advised to read one of the excellent clinical epidemiology texts currently available.

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Non-sexist research methods. A practical guide. Ed: Margrit Eichler. (Pp 183; £5.95) London: Allen and Unwin, 1988.

Sexism appears to be a major problem in social scientific research. Did you know that there were seven different categories of sexism and more than 40

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problems (all with names) which have relevance to research methods in the social sciences? Well, I certainly didn't, but this book by an eminent Professor of Sociology identifies all of them, over and over again. Indeed, one of the stated aims of the book is to: "break down sexism in research into manageable components, these components are more easily and clearly identifiable if they have names" (p 107) . . . like androcentrism, gynocentricity, gender insensitivity, overgeneralisation, gender dysphoria and decontextualization. Whilst the blurb on the back of the book proclaims the text to be relatively free of technical terms, I feel that several good points were in fact obscured in a welter of sociological/feminist jargon. "Sexual dichotism" is: . . . "a modern version of biologism which treats a biological variable (sex) as if it were a social variable" (p 125). I'm bound to say that for me it's sex in its social context that is fun. The author provides us with some stunning insights into research methodology . . . : "If we ask different questions of the two sexes we will receive different answers about them" (p 92).

This book clearly identifies types of sexist problems and the component of the research process in which particular kinds of difficulties may appear. The author illustrates her typologies well, with recent examples from the literature. She also provides thought provoking guidelines for good non-sexist practice.

There is no doubt that sex, in all its permutations, must be taken seriously as a potential source of bias in research. Perhaps this book takes it a little too seriously.

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Handbook of occupational medicine. Ed: Robert J McCunney. (Pp 510; £15.95) Boston: Little, Brown Co, 1988 (distributed by Churchill Livingstone).

This 500 page, small format American paperback gives up to date information on occupational health problems and approaches in a practical fashion. Thus the sections on occupational diseases suggest critical questions in the clinical history, and provide a practical review of management. All the major occupational conditions are covered, and there are useful sections on health promotion, economics, risk assessment, and the role of the occupational physician. While limited for British readers by its American orientation and references, this is a practical and readable book.

Mental health problems in old age. Eds: Brian Gearing, Malcolm Johnson and Tom Heller. (Pp 222, £10.50) Chichester: John Wiley, 1988.

This "reader" produced by the Open University consists of reprints of articles by such authors as Margot Jefferys, Elaine Murphy, and J A Muir Gray. The topics cover the demography of ageing and the epidemiology of mental disorders, community needs, biological factors, assessment of mental health and approaches to treatment and care. It should be a useful source book for students.

Peer review in general practice. Ed: R P T M Grol, P J R Mesker and F G Schellevis. (Pp 230, fl.50) The Netherlands: Nijmegen University, 1988.

The Nijmegen University Department of General Practice in The Netherlands has produced a detailed text on peer review, with discussions of problem solving, issues in the provision of care in general practice, and the development of protocols and of peer review method. Specific protocols for peer review are given for a range of conditions such as abdominal pain, sore throat, and hearing impairment. This should be a useful source book for those involved in peer review and audit, particularly in primary care.

Epidemiology, health and society. Ed: Mervyn Susser. (Pp 309; £35.00) Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.

This is a very interesting collection of reprinted chapters and papers, written by Dr Susser and his collaborators. Mervyn Susser writes well and covers many interesting and original concepts. Several relate to approaches to logic and judgment, addressing Popperian philosophy, causal thinking, the separation of hereditary and environmental factors, and analytical methods. The main strength is the 13 papers under the heading of "Health and society", which present an epidemiological perspective on such issues as the definition of health, the effects of industrialization and of apartheid, life stresses, and early environment. The opening section on epidemiologists in society deals with the ethics of epidemiology and its development, both historically and in recent times, and is an apologetic for the value and relevance of the epidemiological method. This collection should be attractive to a wide range of readers.