

Book reviews

British Asians' health in the community. P Karseras, E Hopkins. (Pp 144; £6.50) Chichester: John Wiley, 1987.

This is a well written book by two practising health visitors whose clients in South Glamorgan included families from the Indian subcontinent. It discusses the cultures and life styles of Asians who have settled in the United Kingdom and the implications of these factors for the delivery of health care, particularly preventive health care to the Asian families.

The book contains good first hand practical advice to community health care workers who come into contact with Asian families. I would like to have read more on the elderly and mentally ill, but the authors decided to focus mainly on maternal and child health. However, they do cover important areas such as the admission of children to hospital, the diet of Asians, and the naming systems.

I found Chapter 2 on communications very informative. It deals with issues that District Health Authorities with populations from the Indian subcontinent are trying to address. The roles of professional interpreters, link workers, and advocates are discussed. The disadvantages of using children in the family as interpreters are highlighted. It is recommended that District Health Authorities with sizeable Asian populations should have professional interpreter services.

The authors write with compassion and have succeeded admirably in their intention to provide community health care workers with practical advice on how to translate theory into services that accord with the expectations and life styles of their Asian clients.

The book merits a wider audience than the authors had in mind. It could be strongly recommended to community physicians, planners, and managers whose districts contain populations from the Indian subcontinent. Researchers embarking on work in the Asian community would find in it invaluable practical advice which could make their task easier.

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Current topics in AIDS, Volume 1. M S Gottlieb, D J Jeffries, D Mildvan, A J Pinching, T C Quinn, and R A Weiss (eds) (Pp 313; £25.00) Chichester: John Wiley, 1987.

Any book on AIDS faces the problem of rapid obsolescence. This volume is intended to be the first of a series in which topics not covered in other texts or where coverage in other texts has become out of date will be reviewed.

Of 14 review articles in all, five deal wholly, or in substantial part, with epidemiological findings. Not surprisingly, the degree of overlap between these chapters is considerable, especially between the chapter on risk factors and their implications for prevention (Chapter 2) and that on natural history (Chapter 4). Although the editors state that some overlap is intentional in order that the chapters can be read in isolation, it might have been more helpful, for the epidemiologically minded reader, if this material had been presented in sequence and collated. Chapter 4 is particularly comprehensive and includes useful discussion of the reliability of HIV antibody tests for epidemiological purposes and of the available information on the progression from HIV infection to AIDS, and pinpoints issues yet to be resolved. The chapter on AIDS in Africa in part suffers from the problem of a book becoming out of date rapidly in such a fast moving field. For example, it does not include comment on the evidence of concentration of AIDS cases along the trade routes from Central Africa around Lake Victoria to Mombasa or some of the more recent discussion about the potential role of scarification in transmission. The chapter on the psychosocial impact of the disease provides a useful reminder that the appearance of new diseases and epidemic forms of old ones is not uncommon, draws parallels with the psychosocial impact and public understanding of other diseases throughout history, and includes reviews of health education efforts and their evaluation and a useful brief critique of methods of determining the extent to which behavioural change occurs in response to a public health intervention.

Five chapters have a substantial clinical content. Chapter 3 gives an overview of the spectrum of disease due to HIV infection: a table giving an indication of the frequency of the different conditions would have been useful. Chapter 8 deals with gastrointestinal manifestations, Chapter 9 with infants and children, Chapter 11 with central nervous system involvement, and Chapter 12 is a collection of clinical observations intended to provoke enquiry.

The remaining chapters include an introduction, a chapter on serological testing (Chapter 7), a chapter on the potential value of T cell phenotyping in the diagnosis and management of AIDS (Chapter 10), and chapters on virology (Chapter 5) and immunopathogenesis (Chapter 6).

In conclusion, this volume promises well for a series of reference works that could be taken in academic or clinical libraries. For the epidemiologist unacquainted

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with the literature on AIDS the book has some value, but the epidemiological aspects will receive more up-to-date coverage as new reviews appear in the medical press.

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A picture of health Department of Community Medicine, Central Birmingham HA, Birmingham B15 2TZ. (Pp 116; £6.95) 1987.

This type of report is now being produced by a number of active, well motivated departments of community medicine. Many people have lamented the loss of the MOH's annual report in recent years, and a number of the 1980s new varieties have been produced. One of the difficulties seems to have been in deciding the target readers for such reports. The general public, fellow professionals, other agencies, health authority members or some mix of these groups have all been suggested and to some extent targeted by different departments.

This report is an excellent attempt to show something of the state of health of the district population for both information and planning purposes. My main criticism is that it contains almost too much detail, particularly tables, charts and figures, and in some places cross referencing could be improved. There also seems to be a reluctance to state conclusions and give some preferences from a community medicine perspective, although it is understood that this was not the main purpose of the document. However, on the whole, this is an excellent first new style report which is likely to become a regular requirement in all districts. Those involved in the compilation of this wealth of information should be congratulated.

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Health and illness. The lay perspective. Michael Calnan (Pp 198, £7.95) London: Tavistock 1987.

Why do some people appear to behave more 'rationally' than others with respect to safeguarding their health? Why do some patients comply with expert advice more readily than others? These

questions are not new, nor is the idea that such behaviour may be associated with social class. The challenge is how we go about explaining patterns of health-related behaviour and understanding their implications for the organisation of effective health care initiatives.

In this book Michael Calnan provides a valuable contribution to the goal of understanding health-related behaviour by setting out a framework within which to examine the ways in which lay health beliefs and perspectives, linked to the wider social structure via social class membership, might influence various types of health and illness behaviour. Calnan makes good use of evidence from previous studies and theoretical writings, but most of the substance of the book is drawn from the accounts given to him by 60 women in research interviews covering such items as their definitions of health and illness, their perceptions of vulnerability to disease, and the degree to which they see themselves as having control over their own health.

The rationale for this approach rests on the assumption that lay health beliefs contain more than just an imperfect understanding of medical 'facts'. This assumption is borne out in the complex, and sometimes unexpected, beliefs which are described in this book. Why should working class women appear to dismiss ideas about the relation between inequalities in health and income or occupation, and how does this relate to their scepticism regarding the possibilities of preventing disease? Why should the respondents generally find it easier to define and discuss the idea of 'health maintenance' than that of 'illness prevention'? Does this tell us something about the appropriate use of language and ideas in health education?

Calnan avoids the temptation of looking too hard for simple connections between beliefs and behaviour. Instead, he develops models which strive to encompass the multidimensional character of the sets of beliefs he describes, allowing room not only for personal perspectives but also for the contribution of the medical opinions and sociopolitical ideologies which contribute to lay health perspectives.

For readers who are looking for conclusive statements, the book may prove frustrating, nor is it intended as a guide to how individual patients might be expected to behave. What this book does offer is some rich food for thought for anyone engaged in the design of health care programmes, preventive or not, where the participation and cooperation of the population targeted is crucial to a successful outcome.

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