

Books reviews

an outline of a new theory of behavioural change, which, the authors claim, overcomes the inadequacies of earlier models.

Anyone with a feeling that there may be a degree of ambiguity in the title of this publication can be reassured at this point. For in this book there is a relatively free interchange between the use of Public Health (the discipline) and public health (the health of the public). This book is about changing both. If Public Health is to improve the health of the public, it must adopt a broader approach by promoting the consideration of health by policy makers outside the field of Public Health as well as within. In order to do this, the authors argue that much research is needed which must be supported by appropriate funding policies.

This book is well set out and comprehensively referenced and indexed. It contains a wealth of information which will interest students and workers in the social and behavioural sciences, public health and health promotion. I do not feel, however, that it will reach the wider audience for which it is intended. Multiple authorship has led to a variety of styles, some readable, others sadly not. There is obscure word usage and unnecessary jargon in many places which does little to demystify the subject. In addition, there are other barriers which may well make this book inaccessible: there is much criticism of the Public Health "establishment". This is especially evident in the early chapters and if the readers are antagonised at this stage, the messages which should make this book a valuable contribution to the development of a New Public Health will surely be lost.

MARTIN WHITE

*Senior Registrar in Community Medicine,
Northumberland Health Authority, Morpeth*

Epidemiology and health risk assessment. Ed: L. Gordis (Pp 294; £28.00) New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Few people in the prosperous industrialised nations can be unaware of the rapidly increasing public concern about the possible ill effects of chemicals and various forms of radiation upon health. The general public and its representatives desire, and sometimes demand, definitive information about such health risks, but the scientific community deals in estimates of risk with inherent, and often large, uncertainties.

This book is the outcome of a conference held in Columbia, Maryland, in May 1985, which arose out of a concern that decision makers in government and industry did not understand how to apply the results of epidemiological studies to the analysis studies of

health risk. The editor and all 32 other contributors are based in the United States. The book comprises five sections, entitled "Overview of health risk assessment"; "The contribution of epidemiology to health risk assessment"; "Refining epidemiologic approaches to assessment of exposure"; "Quantitative expression of risk"; and "The evaluation of epidemiologic information".

Each section begins with an introductory chapter. These are brief, clearly written and basic in their approach. Some subsequent chapters are almost entirely theoretical, whereas others consist largely or entirely of examples. In general the writing is clear with little duplication of material, although the logic behind the organisation of topics is not always obvious. A section about urine screening for chemical exposure, for example, appears in a chapter entitled "Developmental risks: epidemiologic advances in health assessment."

The editor and publishers do not specify for whom this volume is intended. It is an introductory rather than an exhaustive discussion of the subject. I suspect that most epidemiologists and doctors in public health will be familiar with the concepts discussed, though not with all the examples used; they may find discussion of technical aspects of assessment of pollutants in the environment and in individuals of interest. Presumably the editor and authors would like their messages to be heard and understood by government and industry, and, to this end, the introductory and concluding chapters are reasonably accessible to those without prior knowledge of the subject.

KEVIN WALSH

*MRC Environmental Epidemiology Unit
Southampton*

Preventive screening of adults. An evaluation of methods and programmes. D A T Griffiths, E J Ruitenberg. (Pp 164; price not stated). Sainte-Ruffine, France: Maisonneuve SA, 1987.

This is the report of the Select Committee of Experts of the Council of Europe. It sets out to consider the various methods of preventive screening for early signs of disease, defects or risk factors in adults and to evaluate their efficiency, effectiveness and social feasibility.

In the opening chapter, the definition, objectives, and characteristics of preventive screening are unambiguously clarified. The implications for evaluation of screening are specified. The questions and criteria applied in the evaluation of preventive screening and of screening tests are listed and briefly