

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.

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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.

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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

explained. A detailed exposition of the levels of economic evaluation is given. The components of evaluation are succinctly summarised in the form of an evaluation protocol.

In the subsequent chapters, the book reviews screening for a whole range of specific diseases and conditions; infective and parasitic diseases, neoplasms, diabetes, diseases of blood, behavioural disorders, glaucoma, cardiovascular diseases, lung diseases, congenital anomalies, disorders of the elderly and multiphasic screening. Evaluation of screening for each disease or condition is briefly summarised, followed by a clear and authoritative statement of recommendations.

The book is well written and easy to follow, but its presentation could have been better. I would have liked a concise table synthesising the recommendations and guiding the reader to the salient points.

A book of this size could not be expected to answer all the less common questions and cannot be used uncritically as a full review, but should be seen as a good, brief guide to preventive screening and will be of value and interest to all those interested in the subject. The opening chapter of the book is essential reading to all practitioners and students of public health.

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SHORT REVIEWS

Confronting AIDS: Update 1988. Institute of Medicine, National Academy of Sciences. (Pp 239; £13.75) Washington DC: National Academy Press, 1988.

The epidemic of books on AIDS almost matches that of the disease. This latest from the Institute of Medicine in the United States is an update of *Confronting AIDS: Directions for public health, health care, and research* which was published in 1986 and provided a comprehensive assessment of what was known about AIDS at that time. About 60 correspondents contributed material to the 1988 update which covers a wide spectrum of topics including the epidemiology and biology of HIV, prevention, medical care, and research needs. A committee at the Institute of Medicine has synthesised this material into a readable and well referenced text which includes recommendations for the future control of the disease.

Canadian guidelines for healthy weights. Report of an Expert Group convened by the Health Promotion Directorate. (Pp 126; free of charge) Ottawa: Ministry of Health and Welfare, Canada, 1988.

This is a technical report describing the scientific rationale supporting the selection of new weight guidelines for Canadian adults. It includes the reasons why new guidelines were needed, the process in selecting the body mass index (BMI) and waist-hip ratio (WHR) as indicators, epidemiological reviews of weight surveys, including those based on Canadian data, and recommendations for implementation of the guidelines for healthy weights. This report will be of interest to those concerned with weight and fitness surveys and health promotion. Another document, *Promoting healthy weights: A discussion paper*, has been published in parallel with the technical report with the aim of informing the Canadian public about the problems of weight and of presenting a strategic framework for promoting healthy weights.