The book provides an excellent review of the current issues facing health promotion. It will no doubt become a core text for diploma and graduate courses in health promotion, as it should for the training of other medical professionals throughout the health sector.


Improving the health of our population by matching finite resources to needs is an issue of pressing importance. Recent changes in the NHS in Britain have paved the way for systematic assessment of health need. Before this opportunity can be fully grasped, it is essential that the concepts of health need assessment are understood and agreed by all. This book fills an important gap in this respect by attempting a description of health need assessment within the context of the NHS changes.

The authors highlight the fact that resources are finite and state firmly that health need assessment is only a part of a larger strategic process. The book clarifies that need assessment will not provide all the answers to operational difficulties and the reader is also cautioned against unrealistic expectations from need assessment.

One cannot disagree with the authors that a framework is necessary to carry out population need assessment in an effective manner. The suggestion of using a life cycle framework is good, but may not be the only one. However, the life cycle approach can be readily translated into practice and its application should be attempted more widely.

The book is divided into 15 chapters. The opening two describe the recent NHS changes and the concept of need assessment. Chapters 3 and 4 outline the relevant epidemiological, demographic, and sociological techniques. The fifth chapter explains the life cycle framework and chapters 6 to 14 address the priorities for need assessment at each stage of life. The final chapter identifies the challenges of purchasing for health gain. The issues to consider when selecting topics for needs assessment are listed in the form of appendices. A list of routine sources of data is also provided at the end, but this is rather incomplete and unrelated to health service information systems.

The book could have been more readable if some real life examples had been included and the issues had been more provocatively debated. Some concepts and the health economic techniques and the role of marginal analysis in need assessment would also have helped. Despite these reservations, I would still recommend this book to anyone involved in need assessment.


The current concerns regarding the effective provision of trauma care in Britain have kindled an awareness amongst health care professionals of the necessity of high quality epidemiological research both for the planning of services for injury management and for its primary prevention. This timely American publication, written in response to the paucity of bibliography in this area and the burgeoning transatlantic interest in injury epidemiology, seeks to teach the student, or the scientist with little or no experience in injury research, how injury epidemiology is carried out. In this respect the book has filled the niche well. Although its broad scope inevitably tends towards a general intellectual approach to certain issues, for example treatment and rehabilitation, than might have been wished for, the inclusion of key references at the conclusion of each chapter should enable interested readers to expand upon their introduction to the topic. The book is organised around the theme that injury epidemiology should be useful and not merely an intellectual pursuit and does not simply deal with the application of the theory and consequent methods; rather it illustrates the uses and misuses of epidemiological data relevant to injury control. The book is divided into two main parts, the first methodological, the second dealing with more topical matters. The concepts and practices discussed are well illustrated, albeit sometimes laboriously, by example.

Chapters 1 to 5 trace the background and application of the concepts originated in infectious disease epidemiology to injury epidemiology and consider some of the more generalisable, more researchable studies, study design, injury severity scoring systems, the use of data sources for case identification, and the behavioural aspects of injury risk. The general discussion of ideas and techniques contained within this half of the book also make it a useful introductory text for students with wider interests in epidemiological research.

The final five chapters examine the effects of legislation on behaviour modification and product design, assess the effectiveness of various prevention programmes on injury incidence and severity, and discuss the importance of injury services and trauma care, and address the economic implications of injury.

The main criticism of this otherwise admirable book is that some of its utility is lost for the British reader. While the general principles of the science transcend national boundaries, the descriptions of data sources for injury surveillance, injury aetiology, health service management, and the legal and financial systems do not and are specific to the US experience. However, apart from this, and the occasional self indulgence in allowing some sections to become personal vehicles for the author's preferences and disagreements with economic theories, Leon Robertson has produced a balanced and useful introductory text which provides a broad background to this field and should stimulate interest in an important area of epidemiology.