BOOK REVIEWS


The book is part of a European Commission funded project, which has the objective of supporting cooperation between western European researchers. A first book, already published in September, resulted from 18 European countries in a standard format. This second book includes five new empirical analyses, but has eight papers covering methodological problems, potential explanations of inequalities, and the policy implications of studies.

A valuable European dimension is provided to the debate on health inequalities in Britain. Two important reports were published in 1993. The first, Adding Inequalities in Health: An Agenda for Action, was published by the King’s Fund. The second, Variations in Health, What Can the Department of Health and Clini
cians Do?, was produced by a group convened by the Chief Medical Officer (CMO). Both aim to make inequalities a central public policy issue, to stimulate the application of existing research, and to define a more intervention based research agenda.

The review of European work illustrates a similar process of attempting to apply analyses, given that inequalities have been shown to exist in all the countries studied. This provides significant inputs to the discussion on achieving this aim. The chapter by Sally MacIntryre reviews the range of the indicators used in European research, and illustrates the importance of defining indicators for specific processes to be addressed in public policy interventions. The chapter by Johan Macken

bach on the Dutch Government’s five year research programme, has important implications for the CMO’s recommendations for more integrated research. With the growth of collaboration between European researchers, and of European programmes to reduce inequality, the book in general will make an important contribution to work that aims to translate research into action.

PETER FLYNN


The provision of universal medical care, free at the point of delivery, remains the avowed bedrock of the NHS, to which all political parties in Britain subscribe. Yet all parties also realise that this ideal is becoming less and less attainable. This book traces the events of the last 14 years as the Conservative Government has sought to address the problem, largely through organisational restructuring and the introduction of modern management. The two authors have wide and very differing experience of the NHS. Tony Kember, an Oxford graduate in the 1950s, followed the old ‘administrator’ pathway, eventually becoming a regional general manager and finally an advisor in the Department of Health before retirement. Gordon Macpherson, also graduated in the mid 50s, but in medicine, worked in general practice, then for the BMA and finally as deputy editor of the BMJ. Two of the 14 chapter are written jointly, seven by Kember and four by Macpherson. Topics covered include general management, primary care, the internal market, clinicians in management, the independent sector, community care funding and resource allocation, and management and accountability.

Reasonably, the most recent reforms get the greatest coverage, but these are seen more clearly as part of a continuum stretching back up to the 1970 Royal Commission on the NHS. Topics are dealt with in a generally balanced way, though neither author is an uncritical enthusiast for the current changes. This is hardly surprising given Macpherson’s background, but perhaps more telling coming from Kember. Terms like ‘the mirage of the market’ and comments such as ‘After 45 years the personnel capability (of the NHS) is still weak. The committed and loyal NHS staff deserve better.’ or ‘Too often interven
tion from the centre has failed to capitalise on that goodwill upon which the future of quality care depends,’ will strike a chord with many readers.

This book is not light reading, though it reads easily. It has occasional flashes of light relief - what about this for a Trivial Pursuits question? Which two organisations, world
ewide, employ more people than the NHS? Answer, The Soviet Military and the Indian Railways!

Who should read the book? I believe it is mandatory reading for any lay person involved in the present day NHS, especially non-executive members of health authorities and trust boards and members of community health councils. Politicians and civil servants, especially those who find themselves in ‘health’ after the next general election, should certainly do. It should also find a place as background reading material on management courses for health service professionals. The final chapter by Kember almost deserves separate publication as it admirably summarises the central thesis of the book: ‘... we face a health crisis ... it would appear that the health changes intro
duced since 1979 will fail to provide the answer. The reforms have brought some suc
cesses and potential successes ... what the reforms have failed to do, however, is to address how modern society can meet future demands given ... the fact that there is only a limited amount of money available for health care.’ I couldn’t agree more!

BRIAN MCGUCKEN

Medical Director, Wigan and Leigh Health Services, NHS Trust.


While many will point to the slow moving nature of change within health and social services, this text highlights the extent to which ideas around evaluation within a ‘con
sumer’ oriented market have taken hold. On this ground, the book is indeed highly successful. In providing a clear outline of basic evaluative concepts and supporting these with useful reflective questions, the text will be attractive to those in the field who are looking for relatively uncomplicated and usable ideas by which they can evaluate their work. In grounding these ideas in practical examples the text gains additional relevance. So, at this level, readers will find a relatively gentle introduction to both conceptual and methodological elements of service evaluation. Beyond these limits, there are, however, issues left either undeveloped or unresolved. In general terms, one could character
ise the book as having rather instrumental and mechanistic view of evaluation This is perhaps reflected in three major areas: the balance between quantitative and qualitative based evaluation, the issues of research implementation and the role of the ‘con
sumer’ in evaluation.

The first areas is perhaps the easiest to pin down. While generally supporting the notion of the importance of qualitative evaluation, the meagre allowance of two pages of a 176 page book perhaps reflects the authors’ view and obviously denies any possibility of develop
ing a substantial methodological base for examining the conceptual and practical implications of the notion of implementation, is largely ignored in the text. Apart from a brief discussion of ‘who should do the evaluation’ a mechanistic assumption that good evaluation will inform practice and policy is left to prevail. Any consideration of the political context of evaluation would have been useful. Lastly, the ‘consumerist’ discourse that is introduced at the very beginning of the book and which is developed in a later chapter informs a tacit notion of a relatively limited role and scope for such ‘consumers’. This in turn sets a rela
tively restricted view of evaluative method with, crucially, consumers as external com
mentaries on existing services.

SANDY WHITELAW

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chapter on body composition and anthropometry in children in which the relatively new technique of bioelectrical impedance measurement is described. There are a couple of chapters on anthropometry and physical performance and fitness. The final chapter is on the uses of anthropometry in the US armed forces.

Although not a book to recommend for the bookshelf of every public health physician, it will be useful to those involved in research relating to the measurement of human characteristics.

JANET CADE
Public Health and Epidemiology, University of Manchester.


The pioneering epidemiological research in ischaemic heart disease (IHD) in Finland is well recognised and this small book provides a useful contribution to the specialist literature. The primary data set covers the period 1971-85, the age group 35 to 64 years of age, and links mortality and census data. The author found that region of birth was much more closely linked with mortality from IHD than was region of residence. The author suggests that this provides some support for the hypothesis that this excess mortality is due to the poverty of the childhood environment, although genetic factors are acknowledged as an alternative or additional explanation.

This book contains no original epidemiological survey data and the readers interested in a broader epidemiological view should also read a recently published account of the North Karelia project (The North Karelia Project. 20 Year Results and Experiences. Eds Puska P, Tuomilehto J, Nissinen A, Varhainen E. The National Public Health Institute (KTL), Helsinki: Finland 1995. ISBN: 951-53-0439-7). This summarises the considerable public health achievements in reducing the mortality from cardiovascular disease in the whole of Finland and provides a bibliography of the important series of papers published by the authors linking changes in risk factors with trends in IHD mortality.

JOHN W G YARNELL
Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, Queen's University of Belfast, Belfast.


This handy sized book is aimed at those doctors and medical students who wish a brief introduction to basic statistical analysis as well as the basic principles underlying more complicated analytical techniques. The book is well laid out with numerous worked examples to illustrate the points discussed. In addition, there are questions at the end of each chapter so that readers may test their understanding of the contents. The first three chapters, as with most books of this type, deal with presenting types of data and how to summarise univariate, bivariate, and multivariate data. Of particular use, however, are the subsequent chapters, which provide an introduction to statistical power, and the principles behind hypothesis testing, confidence intervals, and a calculation of statistical power. The author highlights important aspects for the clinician in these topics and provides clear explanations of the relationships - eg, between confidence intervals and p values or confidence intervals and sample size. A brief introduction to statistical modelling is provided, with a worked example on multiple linear regression and discussion of survival analysis. The book concludes with a chapter on the interpretation of statistical analysis incorporating discussion of bias, chance, and of meta-analysis.

This book will be particularly useful to those who, either by choice or by necessity, find themselves conducting studies, but who have little statistical experience. It will enable them to understand the principles behind the planning of their experiment, to carry out a preliminary data analysis, and to benefit more from the additional expertise to be provided by their local medical statistician.

GARY MACPHERLANE
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This book, which includes contributions from 23 authors, is a very welcome addition to the literature on occupational epidemiology. It is divided into two main sections, the first considers the available information on aspects of work in relation to disease. Four chapters are devoted to occupational cancer, considering the effects of metals and chemicals, ionising radiation, electromagnetic fields, and mineral dust and fibres. The authors of these chapters have provided a very thorough review of the most important aspects of these topics. The remaining chapters of this first section are devoted to non-malignant disease and, taking as an example the chapter on musculo-skeletal diseases, the reader is provided with a detailed yet concise summary of the evidence relating aspects of employment to disorders of the back, lower limb, and upper limb. There is also a comprehensive bibliography from over 100 references at the end of this chapter, allowing the reader to research whichever particular aspect of the subject interests him or her, in greater detail. A particularly interesting chapter in this section analyses the evidence linking stress at work to specific diseases as well as measures of mental health and general well being.

The second section of the book is devoted to methodology in occupational epidemiology. This will be particularly useful for students, since a thorough grounding is given of the design of studies, assessment of exposure, measurement of outcome, and evaluation of preventive measures. There is also a comprehensive bibliography from over 100 references at the end of this chapter, allowing the reader to research whichever particular aspect of these topics interests him or her, in greater detail. A particularly interesting chapter in this section analyses the evidence linking stress at work to specific diseases as well as measures of mental health and general well being.


The Salvation Army, who commissioned the original research, have developed a strategy for their London services to homeless people who draws heavily on this book's findings. The 'more subtle' findings 'will probably take more time to find their way into the consciousness of Government ministers' (p xiv). My concern is with the people considering spending £30 on the book.

Government ministers, assuming they were presented with the findings from the start, have certainly had plenty of time to digest them. It seems quite extraordinary that despite five years' lapse between fieldwork (a series of surveys of homeless people in various types of location) and publication, none of the four authors reports anything that has been happening in the meantime. Not only is the reference list woefully out of date - only a handful since 1990 - but if, as the authors boast, 'some of the consequences of the research reported here have already been acted upon,' it would be nice for the reader to be told what those were.

Proof reading leaves a lot to be desired. References quoted in the text are missing in the bibliography; sentences are repeated, sometimes after a few lines; tiny samples are reduced to percentages, not always credibly: how many people are 19% of 14? Homelessness is an appalling problem whose solution can be assisted by data generated by surveys such as this book contains. Book buyers deserve a better deal than they get here, however.

The chapter on begging stands out as an exception. Did you know that the Strand shop-front dwellers look down on the Water-loo lot? That there are weekend beggars? That up to half of beggars, including many of those involved in prostitution, have been in care? This chapter appears not only less dog-eared, but better proof-read.

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