
There has been a growing emphasis on the application of epidemiological methods in the planning of health care services. In the United Kingdom this has been highlighted by the epidemiologically based needs assessment reports which have been sponsored by the National Health Service Executive. This, however, is a large two volume work. Smaller epidemiological texts cover basic principles without addressing these specifically to health care planning.

This book from the United States covers many of the general principles in a single condensed volume and relates them specifically to health care planning. It is evidently written for an American audience and some of the examples are irrelevant to other countries. In addition, it covers some of the same material as the book by Selwyn St Leger et al., entitled Evaluating health services' effectiveness, which was more applicable to the United Kingdom. Nonetheless, this book, edited by Denise Oleske, updates previous textbooks by including business planning techniques as applied to health care services, a practice which has become increasingly prevalent in health services throughout the world. Successive chapters cover the basics of epidemiological techniques comprehensively, although readers will probably need some previous knowledge to understand some of the chapters fully. There is a very useful chapter on strategic planning and epidemiology. As regards measuring outcome of health care and health services, the book includes recent developments in business and epidemiological techniques such as quality management, the 'plan, do, study, act' (PDSA) cycle, practice guidelines, and critical pathways. The book also covers the evaluation of health care systems and technology, as well as including a section on communicable disease control. There is, however, very little mention on the role of primary care.

There are useful exercises at the end of each chapter to help readers apply their newly acquired knowledge to practical situations, with model answers at the end.

In conclusion, the book provides a useful summary for purchasers and planners of health care, as well as postgraduate students in public health medicine, of business and epidemiological health care planning in a single volume. Readers in countries other than the United States would however need to supplement the book with more locally relevant texts.


This is a very clearly written, easy to read book whose stated aim is to provide 'a source of practical ideas and topics for general practice teams who want to develop their role in enabling patients to adopt healthy fulfilling and responsible patterns of sexual behaviour'. The chapters cover issues from sexual health promotion, (why, where, and when?) to ethical considerations, talking about sex, sexual problems, disabled people and sexual practice, contraception provision, management of sexually transmitted diseases, liaison and support services, providing condoms, audit and evaluation and professional development, counselling approaches to health promotion, and motivational skills.

In addition to using contributors with a wide range of experience in the sexual health care field from multi-disciplinary background, there are many different examples. This makes the book particularly useful as a quick reference section as well as useful addresses. Many common problems and words are clearly defined and explained, as well as suggested useful phrases designed to introduce various sensitive topics into a general consultation setting for GPs and nurses.

This book is not a comprehensive guide to the issue of sexual health but concentrates on areas with which general practice teams should be familiar in order to effectively progress their health promotion activities.

Boxes throughout the book highlight practical guidance for history taking, ways to raise the issues of sex with patients, types of sexual activity, and their relationship to 'safe sex' practices, and developing guidelines for sexual history taking, including family planning and sexually transmitted disease histories. Provision of condoms within general practice is given a whole chapter to explore the ethical, practical, and theoretical issues which surround it.

Audit and evaluation is covered, albeit briefly, but it provides a pragmatic approach for primary health care teams. The weakest chapter is probably the last on professional development, which skims the surface and provides pointers for further training. Unfortunately, no specific guidance is provided on further reading in this area, or recommended training courses and materials.

The book is overall very general but provides a useful starting point for general practice teams. Should teams wish to develop their skills in particular areas in more depth further specialised texts would be required, although this further training would be a step on from this book would take a practice team a long way down the path for starting and implementing sexual health promotion within a general practice setting. It is comprehensible to all members of the general practice team as it is not unduly laden with unexplained medical jargon, making it easily readable, clear, and pragmatic.