

and will be a superb basic reference for anyone considering quality research in this area.

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Epidemiology and the delivery of health care services: Methods and application.

Denise M Oleske (ed) (Pp 235; £45.00) New York Plenum Press, 1995. ISBN 0-30644968-4.

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 is 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 of statistics 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.

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Homelessness and ill health. A report of a working party of the Royal College of Physicians. James Connelly and June Crown (eds) (Pp 143; £8.50) London: The Royal College of Physicians, 1995. ISBN 186016-009-3.

This is a welcome report that provides a critical summary of the scientific literature concerning the connection between homelessness and ill health in the United Kingdom. It also makes recommendations as to how health services, local authorities, and primary care can help to address the problem. The report highlights homelessness as being part of a spectrum of housing need. At one extreme are those who are statutorily accepted as being homeless, while at the other there are individuals who are currently within households but where relationships and living conditions are highly unsatisfactory and intolerable. Housing need would also encompass occupiers of short term housing tenancies which are increasingly the norm in the privately rented market.

The report primarily concerns itself with the two groups of greatest housing need. The first are the 'official homeless'. In the United Kingdom these individuals have a statutory right to be housed by local authorities and are mainly families and pregnant women (group 1). The second group consists of rough sleepers, night shelter and hostel users, or self referrals to bed and breakfast hotels (group 2). These individuals are mainly single and are not included in official statistics. The authors of the report make the point that the official homeless are only a small part of the problem and that the current mix of housing is unable to meet needs adequately.

The authors explore the complex relation between homelessness and ill health. People with ill health are less likely to receive housing that meets their needs and are also at increased risk of homelessness. Procedures for housing the homeless on the basis of being officially homeless, or on the basis of medical priority are inadequate in meeting the requirements of individuals with health needs.

Both groups of homeless individuals covered by the report show evidence of increased mental and physical ill health, and high rates of utilisation of hospital and community services. Access to primary care is often difficult because of the way patients are registered with a general practice. The working party emphasises, however, that groups 1 and 2 are quite different in terms of social demographic and health profile and need different interventions.

The report's recommendations to government, local authorities, and the health service are useful but often do not go far enough. In particular, not enough emphasis is given to the association between homelessness and poverty, and the effect of government policy on welfare benefits that helps to exacerbate the problem. These include changes to the benefit system, which will restrict access to the payment of mortgages for the newly unemployed. Having said that, the report provides useful suggestions on how to improve services for the homeless and the appendices provide useful examples of good practice from various parts of Great Britain.

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Sexual Health Promotion in General Practice. Hilary Curtis, Tony Holaghan, and Carey Jewitt (eds) (Pp 125; £15.00) Abingdon; Rodcliffe Medical Press, 1995. ISBN 1-85775-131-0.

This is a very clearly written, easy to read book whose stated aim is to provide 'a source of practical ideas and guidance 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, psychosexual 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 backgrounds, there are references and further reading sections 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, along with further training. However, 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.

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