

A Guide to the Care of the Elderly. R B Shukla and D Brooks. (Pp361; £40.00). London: HMSO 1996. ISBN 0-11-701830-9.

The increasing number of elderly people in society affects most doctors' practice and necessitates a multi-disciplinary approach. The editors have aimed to produce a guide, to appeal to doctors in postgraduate training, as well as those already engaged in the care of the elderly. There are contributions from heterogeneous backgrounds, covering a wide variety of topics.

The book is divided into four main sections. The first covers foundations of elderly care, such as demographics and the role of the GP. The second covers common medical problems, and the third important specific diseases. The final section is termed development and the wider picture, including audit and research. Sometimes the inclusion of subjects in certain sections seems arbitrary. Each chapter ends with a useful summary of practical points.

Areas such as retirement, community care, benefits, legal issues, and sexuality and the elderly are written about. These are topics often encountered in general practice and not usually covered in one text.

Due to the number of chapters, each is very succinct and on occasions this is dissatisfying. Although dementia has a chapter to itself, comments regarding depression are scattered and more difficult to access. Ischaemic heart disease is discussed under hypertension and dyspnoea, but little is mentioned about rehabilitation in this context. Health in developing countries is discussed in a chapter, but dealing with the health problems of elderly ethnic minority groups in the UK is only touched upon.

As the title indicates this is a guide to care and the authors acknowledge that it is not a

geriatric textbook. It is a broad and concise introduction to this subject and is probably best suited to those in training, both GP registrars and senior house officers. The information has had to be distilled at times to create a manageable text. The diversity of content is at the core of its appeal.

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Changing Services for Older People.

Alan Walker and Lorna Warren (Pp 184; £14.99 pb/£45.00 hb). Buckingham: Open University Press 1996. ISBN: 0-335-19137-1 (pb); 0-335-19138-X (hb).

This book describes a study that was conducted in Sheffield—in fact, it describes the “tale” behind the study. It describes the evaluation of an elderly persons' support unit whose aims are to care for elderly people in their homes and to prevent the need for them to go into residential care if they do not want to, and to strengthen family, friendship and neighbourhood networks by supporting individual carers and developing voluntary and community services.

The tale illustrates well the difficulties in undertaking evaluative research into health services or social services innovations, so from this point of view the book provides some comfort to those who have experienced such difficulties. The intention of the authors was to evaluate several units using a prospective experimental methodology. The establishment of the first unit was delayed considerably so that a pragmatic observational approach was employed, this included quantitative and qualitative approaches. The study used a triangulation of methods and gathered

data from key groups; team leaders, support workers, members of the health teams, management, administrative staff, and senior management. Selected samples of older users and carers of the service (134 households) were also involved in the study.

Eighteen case studies of users were also conducted in order to explore the extent to which the service aims of flexibility and user-centredness were met. A comparative group consisted of users and carers of a traditional home care service in an area with a similar sociodemographic profile (94 households). “Outcomes” were compared in the two groups—morale, distress, loneliness, disability, dependency etc. These carers were interviewed at baseline and then 12 to 16 months later. Fifty three matched pairs were used in the analysis. Carers were also interviewed with a structured questionnaire at baseline and then, at follow up, unstructured interviews took place. The information gathered from users and carers was particularly enlightening.

The description of the study is pre-empted by a description of changing social services in many countries in Europe. Whilst this is informative and interesting, it does not seem central to the main theme of the book.

This book will not only be of interest to fellow social and health researchers, but also policy makers and practitioners involved in community care from a health or social service stable. Aspiring researchers into health and social service innovations should read this “tale” - there is much to learn from it. The authors are to be applauded for their determination.

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