BOOK REVIEWS


A highly recommended read for those who would seek a solid introduction to the discipline and methodology of undertaking a formal analysis of the future as it relates to public health. The futures approach is a well defined discipline that uses a range of tools to construct a scenario and vision of the future in order to give policy makers a long range perspective. It is targeted at public sector health service managers in developing countries, and assumes readers have no previous experience in the concepts and techniques of futures studies. The reader is given a comprehensive approach to developing scenarios that anticipate the future impact of demographic trends, new health care technologies, global climate change, newly emerging diseases, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and the effect of market forces on access to essential drugs. Using these techniques will provide managers with the tools to break the pattern of habitual "business management", and motivate for action at the appropriate time.

The book has nine chapters. The first two cover an introduction to the concepts of futures, and give useful examples of futures projects in a variety of health care settings and countries. Chapters three to six describe the methodology of futures exercises: initiating and funding projects; using different designs; and the different tools to use. A useful section describes the use of computer software, models, and tool kits. Chapter seven gives a comprehensive review of the application of futures techniques to health. Chapters eight and nine provide details on printed and online information resources and a directory of health futures organisations, training courses and potential funding sources. A comprehensive glossary of new terms makes the book very accessible to novices.

WALTER BARKER
Early Childhood Development Centre, Bristol, UK


This book sets as its aim to provide an introduction to the statistical methodology that underpins randomised controlled trials. It is intended for students of statistics (honours year and postgraduate) and takes a mathematical approach to the subject. The book covers most of the important features of the design and analysis of clinical trials, developing the necessary statistical theory. It also covers sequential methods, cross over studies and equivalence trials. However, survival analysis is omitted and the analysis of binary outcomes is only partially covered. The rationale for this may be that the author wanted to avoid a mathematical treatment of these topics: if so, a heuristic explanation may have been a better option. Despite this limitation the book achieves its aim, and has many excellent features. It expands on the theory by using worked examples that are based on real data. These are analysed using the package Minitab and helpful guidance is given on the commands used to conduct the analyses. However, the reader will be frustrated because the raw data on which the analyses are run are not included with the book. Another attractive feature is the inclusion of exercises at the end of each chapter, for which helpful solutions are provided at the end of the book. Overall, if you have a good grounding in statistics, this will be a very useful book.

J N S MATTHEWS

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