

BOOK REVIEWS

Oxford textbook of public health, 4th edn

Edited by R Detels, J McEwen, R Beaglehole, H Tanaka. Oxford University Press, 2002. (Pp 1956; 596 euros). ISBN 0-19-263041-5

The *Oxford textbook of public health* was published for the first time in 1984 as a comprehensive update of the main topics related to public health, in order to show the breadth and depth of its different subjects, to detail changes within the field, to explain new and current medical practices, and to identify the tendencies of the public health agenda. Since its inception, it has served as a mandatory text for students at all levels of public health education. Now, in his fourth edition, this textbook updates the chapters of previous versions and tackles current issues such as genetics, bioterrorism, resurgent and emergent infectious diseases, and advances in public health focuses and interventions.

The chapters on determinants of health, health policies, health and human rights, legislation and ethical issues in public health, techniques in social sciences, functions of public health, assessing health needs, and costs effectiveness analysis, among others, open the doors to debates on matters of interest to public health administrators, as well as those problems that might jeopardise their efforts in the next years. The textbook maintains its traditional division of three volumes: "Scope of public health", "Methods of public health", and "The practice of public health". Each chapter provides an overview of fundamental controversies, a look at developing trends, and data on recent medical advances.

Nevertheless, the main merit of this new version is its intention to include, in the scope of the public health, issues from developing and developed countries. In a globalised world where the poverty and the deprivation

continue undermining the benefit of health, the textbook summoned experts from many countries, among them North America, Europe, Asia, Australia and New Zealand, who display their own perspectives.

The *Oxford textbook of public health*, even better in this edition, whose content will continue acting as the front door to the current discussions on public health and whose will of opening has been specified by the publishers, provokes three concerns: the diffusion to non-English speaking users, the acquisition by readers of the developing world, (where the price, which can be accessible in the industrialised countries represents the monthly wage of a professional of public health), and the participation of the points of view of Latin America, which is still scarce.

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Health and diseases among women

Edited by R B Ness, L H Kuller. Oxford University Press, 1999. (Pp 465; price not stated). ISBN 0-19-511396-9.

It has been described that health differences exist between women and men: women have higher life expectancy, but they experience more disability and reduced quality of life than men do. Recently it has been pointed out that gender differences in health varied according to the condition studied.¹ *Health and diseases among women* is a book, written by USA researchers that focuses on the environmental and biological influences that mediate differences in health between women and men. It develops models that link pathophysiology to observations in epidemiological studies.

The book has four main sections. Part I includes psychosocial and lifestyle issues that influence differential diseases among women and men, for example, depression, violence against women, or socioeconomic gradients

in health. Part II analyses diseases related with sex steroids hormones, for example, ischaemic heart diseases, osteoporosis or breast cancer. At the beginning of this section there is a chapter explaining hormones in women. Part III includes mainly women's diseases attributable to their anatomical attributes. The section begins with two chapters about the anatomy of the genital tracts (for women and men) and on the basic principles of immunology and the genital tract. Examples of diseases included in this part are urinary incontinence or sexually transmitted bacterial disease. Finally, Part IV deals with the effects of reproduction and contraception on women's health, including health conditions during pregnancy, sexually transmitted disease, and thrombosis.

From my point of view, this book is very interesting and complete, dealing with epidemiology and pathophysiology of women's disease. Other aspects dealing with social sciences, including social epidemiology² would help to understand health differences between women and men.

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References

- 1 Macintyre S, Hunt K, Sweeting H. Gender differences in health. Are things really as simple as they seem? *Soc Sci Med* 1996;42:617-24.
- 2 Berkman LF, Kawachi I, eds. *Social epidemiology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

