

Mental health services — the future

New Directions for Mental Health Services. Ed. by C. A. Taube, D. Mechanic and A. A. Hohmann. Pp. xii + 324. Illustrated. R172,50. USA: Hemisphere Publishing Corporation. 1990.

This book is a report on a 1987 American conference on the future of mental health services. It is, however, apposite to South Africa since it covers the contemporary range of services and also deals with research into needs and delivery. Also, quality control and the effectiveness of different schemes of mental health care, complex

issues of organisation, accountability and competition between state and private resources are discussed.

Of particular interest are the chapters dealing with the financing of mental health services, such as insurance schemes, health maintenance organisations and fee-for-services, because of the movement to private-sector involvement in South Africa. The Americans have tried a variety of schemes that we are only beginning to look at, and we should benefit from their positive and negative experiences, albeit that more has accumulated since the time of this conference. This book will be interesting and useful for public and private mental health planners and organisations providing services.

L. S. Gillis

Closed head injury

Clinical and Neuropsychological Aspects of Closed Head Injury. Ed. by J. T. E. Richardson. Pp. xi + 351. Illustrated. R131,10. London: Taylor & Francis. 1990.

This book, published in 1990, is one of a series entitled *Brain Damage, Behaviour and Cognition*. The editors' rationale for publishing the series is to 'present comprehensive and up-to-date overviews of current developments in specific areas of interest' because 'neuropsychology is now centrally important for those working with brain-damaged people'.

This work certainly fulfills the criteria. The field has been extensively researched and chapters cover the major neuropsychological sequelae, including retrograde and post-traumatic amnesia, memory function, cognition and language, subjective complaints and personality disorders.

The chapter covering the latter deals in some depth with the post-concussional syndrome, a welcome inclusion because patients' complaints of headache, anxiety, irritability and dizziness after minor head injury are sometimes dismissed. The authors point out that patients who have made a good physical recovery after minor head injury frequently suffer more from environmental stress than patients with severe head injury whose disabilities are apparent. In the former, reduced information-processing ability is frequently not recognised, and patients are expected to perform at pre-morbid level when tasks that require simultaneous attention to a number of factors are beyond their capacity. While it may be true that persistent symptoms of anxiety, irritability, dizziness and headache are sometimes psychological reactions to stress after trauma, some may take issue with the authors' concluding statements that they are more common in patients with pre-morbid neurotic personalities.

I found the chapter on mechanisms of structural pathology interesting, and support the authors' contention of the necessity for good rehabilitation programmes with a multidisciplinary approach — a service sadly lacking in our country.

The book is a useful reference source for professionals involved in brain and behaviour studies.

Cora de Villiers

Health economics

Studies in Health Economics 13: Do Expanded Home Care Services Reduce Costs? Ed. by J. H. Sommer. Pp. 57. Illustrated. SFr. 8,50. Basle: Pharma Information. 1990.

This booklet is a review for Swiss policymakers of 14 studies to investigate the effectiveness of case management and/or home care of elderly long-term patients. The individual studies used changes in amounts of inpatient care and total costs and improved survival and quality of life as outcome measures. The booklet is relevant to: gerontologists for its focus on a key question in the care of the elderly; to epidemiologists for its approach to the critique and overview of methodologically complex studies; and health policy makers and researchers as an example of conscious, careful policy research, review and assessment. And yet all three audiences will be disappointed because of the poor epidemiological methods used in summarising the studies.

The booklet concludes that: case management and the provision of home-care services showed few clear patient, carer, family or survival benefits; failed to reduce total costs; and failed to reduce hospital or nursing-home admission. These are disappointing conclusions for those who are appalled by the high patient day-costs of inpatient care, and believe that passing services on to the community and the family will save money and improve care.

The epidemiologists will object to a single conclusion being drawn from 14 studies without the use of formal meta-analysis to assess the overall impact of the intervention. Meta-analysis differs from narrative reviews (used by the author) which largely rely on the subjective assessment by the reviewer of the conclusions of separate studies.

After recalculating the benefit by pooling data across all studies (a kind of meta-analysis), the result is 'statistically' significant, and although I am no gerontologist, I am sure that a 22% reduction in total nursing home days is useful. Yet the author of this booklet

writes: 'Of the six randomised experiments that recorded nursing home use fully, five showed consistent results. The differences, however, were very small and not statistically significant.' This represents a fundamental misapprehension of the data.

For the policymaker then, I think this booklet has little value, owing to its failure to reach the appropriate conclusion. This is a loss, because we in South Africa need the question of home care and case management answered — not only for care of the elderly, but also for people with AIDS and the chronically ill.

Merrick Zwarenstein

Epidemiology and biostatistics

Clinical Epidemiology and Biostatistics: A Primer for Clinical Investigators and Decision-makers. Ed. by Michael S. Kramer. Pp. xii + 286. Illustrated. DM 76. Berlin: Springer-Verlag. 1989.

In presenting his book the writer gives two reasons for entering what is already a rather crowded field. The first is to present a book that will emphasise principles of analytical (cause and effect) inference. The second is to provide a book that will integrate epidemiological and biostatistical principles by using a common language and by interweaving common examples.

The book is based on a course in clinical epidemiology and biostatistics for 1-year medical students. It is divided into three parts.

Part I deals with epidemiological research design and analytical inference. Attention is given to measurement, rates, research design, analytical bias, observational cohort studies, clinical trials, case control studies and cross-sectional studies.

Part II presents the principles and applications of biostatistics with emphasis on statistical inference. Attention is given to descriptive statistics, hypothesis testing, statistical inference and linear correlation and regression.

Part III comprises four chapters covering special topics, namely: diagnostic tests, survival (life table analysis) and causality. Perhaps surprisingly, the subject of decision analysis is dealt with in some detail.

The book is written in a clear and readable style, but a number of the more advanced biostatistical methods are only mentioned in passing. It should be useful to clinicians and clinical investigators who wish to develop their proficiency in the planning, execution and interpretation of clinical and epidemiological research, and in giving the medical researcher a background in the subject field. The placement of both epidemiology and biostatistics in one volume is done in an effective way and should be of benefit, particularly to the newcomer to the field, in giving an understanding of the relationship between these sister disciplines.

S.A. Fellingham

Healthy eating

Food: What's in it for You? Ed. by Anne Bryce. pp. 320. Illustrated. Cape Town: Don Nelson. 1990.

This useful book provides an excellent source of information for the consumer on all aspects of healthy eating such as best food choices, supermarket shopping, and including food content and storage. The approach is clear, scientific and unbiased.

The contributors are all recognised specialists in their fields and include dietitians, medical doctors, sports scientists and nutrition journalists. Topics include a basic approach to correct nutrition, food additives and preservatives, food allergies and intolerance, optimum freshness and safety of foods, food irradiation, a rather sketchy section on weight control, and requirements for sport and exercise. Guidelines for low cholesterol diets, and cancer prevention are outlined.

A section on drug-nutrient interactions is particularly relevant when one considers how many people of all age groups today are taking medications.

A food dictionary provides nutritional information and fascinating anecdotes about some 250 commonly eaten foods.

This is a book for universal consumption.

Geraldine Mitton