

The foremost strength is the pedagogical approach.

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Shetty PS, McPherson K, editors.
Diet, nutrition and chronic diseases: lessons from contrasting worlds. Chichester, UK: Wiley, 1997. 301 pp., £34.95 (hardback), ISBN 0 471 97133 2

This book represents a well organised and edited report of the Sixth Annual Public Health Forum held at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

The forum was motivated from the evidence that the world is experiencing an accelerating epidemic of diet-related, non-communicable diseases (NCD). Such a trend characterises not only industrialised nations but also many developing countries in which the changing profile of disease diffusion is given by the co-existence of nutritional deficiencies and problems associated with over nutrition.

Chapter 1, including five different papers on diet-related NCDs in Europe, Asia, China, Latin America and Middle East countries respectively, gives a compact overview of the different changes in dietary habits and NCDs in various areas of the world.

More particular aspects of the association between changes in lifestyle, diet and NCDs are thoroughly discussed in Chapters 2–10 of the book, namely pre-natal influences on health status in adult life, interactions between nutritional changes and genetics with reference to cardiovascular diseases and diabetes in migrants, the relationship between inequalities in diet and health, the role of dietary fat intake on NCDs, the role of dietary habits on bowel and breast cancer, the effect of alcohol consumption on mortality and the effect of globalisation of food trade and food policy on public health. Each different topic mentioned above is addressed by means of a main contribution and a critical discussion written by different authors, chosen from among the most outstanding scientists in the area. This approach has allowed a wide and comprehensive review of the various problems addressed, because the presentation is not limited to the point of view of the main contributors, but through the discussion

addresses other aspects that are still open to debate.

The important topics of obesity and physical exercise are discussed, with six different and interesting contributions in Chapter 11 which reports on one of the more relevant issues addressed in the symposium 'The burgeoning global burden of obesity'.

The last three chapters underline the consensus reached by the workshop on the future research and health policy necessary in order to identify effective options for NCD prevention and control. Agreement was reached on some recommendations for i) the dietary prevention of cancer and cardiovascular diseases based on a reduction of fat intake and increasing polysaccharides and vegetable intakes, ii) the design of public health initiatives in order to control and prevent overweight and obesity and iii) the need for research in order to clarify the relationship between diet and blood pressure. More in general, the workshop supported the idea that epidemiological studies and options for the prevention of NCDs should run together. Surely the Sixth Annual Public Health Forum and this book, reporting the conclusive aspects discussed during the forum, borrowing a sentence from the preface, have 'given a significant contribution to the much needed acceleration of action that is required to counter and reverse the accelerating global epidemic of diet-related NCD'.

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Jenkinson C, editor. **Assessment and evaluation of health and medical care: a methods text.** Buckingham, UK: Open University Press, 1997. 189 pp. £45.00 (hardback), £14.99 (paperback). ISBN 0 335 19706 x (hardback), 0335 19705 1 (paperback).

Bowling A. **Research methods in health: investigating health and health services.** Buckingham, UK: Open University Press, 1997. 431 pp. £50.00 (hardback), £16.99 (paperback). ISBN 0 335 19886 4 (hardback), 0335 19885 6 (paperback).

Although the purpose, scope and size of these two books is different, both address various aspects of health and health services appraisal. The aim of this

joint review is not to judge which is the better choice, but rather to help potential readers to make a decision.

According to Crispin Jenkinson, editor of the book and co-author of half of the ten chapters, the purpose of *Assessment and evaluation of health and medical care: a methods text* is 'to provide a critical introduction to the most commonly used forms of evaluation used by health services researchers and epidemiologists'. Indeed, one of the merits of the book is to assemble under the same cover information that is generally scattered in various sources. In short, comprehensive and well written chapters, the emphasis is put on the traditional quantitative instruments used in the field: randomised controlled trials, case-control and cohort studies and surveys, as well as systematic reviews.

This work represents a classical approach of (clinical) epidemiology, often placed in a population-based framework, as illustrated by the chapter on evaluating screening programmes. The measurement of health related quality of life and patient satisfaction is well covered, including the limitations of the concepts and of the instruments. The brief description of economic evaluation in health care provides the basic information necessary for an introduction to the field. One chapter presents several aspects of methods used in qualitative evaluative research and this may seem scanty to readers oriented towards qualitative research. The book may appeal to those readers put off by statistical or mathematical formulae, as there are only a few in the whole book. Readers who like to learn through examples and illustrations may find that there are too few.

A more comprehensive overview of health services evaluation and of how to combine the quantitative and qualitative approaches could have contributed to leading the reader even better through the various chapters and creating a liaison between the multiple facets of the evaluation of health services. Some additional information regarding the evaluation of health care systems and organisations, as well as an overview of assessment in a quality of care approach, might have been appreciated by some readers. The same is true for a brief description of evidence-based medicine and of the Cochrane Collaboration (which could have been more directly indicated in the systematic review chapter).

Students in various health-care professions will glean much useful informa-

tion from this work which is pleasant reading. This is also true for decision and policy makers, as well as for health professionals and managers who feel that they need to get a comprehensive but brief and easy to read summary of the available tools and approaches for the rigorous assessment of health care.

Research methods in health: investigating health and health services is essentially a single-author book by Ann Bowling published the same year by the same publisher; however, it has twice the volume of Jenkinson's text. Bowling considers her book 'more than a text on research methods'. Indeed, there is a broad introduction to the theoretical concepts of appraising health and health services.

The various approaches of epidemiology, sociology, psychology, economics and demography are successively presented, showing the frequent overlaps but also the distinctive features of each approach. Supplemented with the basics of research as well as the presentation of the existing quantitative and qualitative research tools, the multifarious facets of this book make a colourful and attractive picture. Seventeen chapters are grouped in five sections. Every chapter ends with a summary of main points, key questions and terms, and recommended additional readings (books essentially). In the first section 'Investigating health services and health: the scope of research', the multidisciplinary approaches of the field are extensively presented, linked with their historical and philosophical contexts. Health services research is placed in the broader environment of health research.

The presentation of the concept of health needs serves as an introduction to the chapters on epidemiology and demography. One of the merits of this chapter and of the book is to show the various concepts and terminology used in the different approaches of the field. It might, however, still be too confusing as an introductory reading as 'The philosophy, theory and practice of research' is a section comprised of two chapters. After a presentation of the various theories and conceptions of scientific research, key points of research design, methods, measurement and statistical techniques are briefly treated. However, in the third and fourth sections, 'Quantitative research: sampling and research methods' and 'The tools of quantitative research', several methodological aspects of research (statistical testing, sampling, surveys, observational studies, experiments

and alternative designs and development of questionnaires) are developed in more detail, including practical tips. Indeed, although the use of tables and graphs is scarce throughout the book, there are quite a few examples in several chapters of those two sections (e.g. techniques of survey interviewing and questionnaire design) as well as in the final one (e.g. various qualitative approaches). Practical advice from an experienced health services researcher may be welcomed by many readers of the book. Numerous approaches of qualitative research, including combined quantitative and qualitative methods, are covered in approximately 75 pages in the last section of the book. Much effort has been made to describe the role and place of qualitative research and to show that qualitative research can be a powerful research tool, provided that science, as a guide and methodological rigour, as a tool, are the grounding principles.

Through its various perspectives on health and health services research, as well as the richness of information it contains, Ann Bowling's book is more an orientation and a resource publication than an introductory text. As such it might well prove very useful to various health and other professionals involved in those fields (including policy and decision makers).

Each book offers approximately 25 pages of references. A glossary of terms is included in Bowling's publication. Neither of these books is sufficient by itself to provide all the background tools and theoretical support to the researcher or practitioner in health appraisal or health services research. However, both books, written by acknowledged scientists, derive their interest from their updated approach to a growing field of research, development and assessment. *Bernard Burmand, Clinical Epidemiology Unit, University Institute of Social and Preventive Medicine, 17 rue du Bugnon, 1005 Lausanne, Switzerland*

Abbott P, Sapsford R, editors.
Research into practice: a reader for nurses and the caring professions,
2nd edition. Buckingham, UK:
Open University Press, 1997.
163 pp. £14.99 0 335 19695 0

This book is a collection of examples of research, all in some way concerning nursing or the study of health and community care. One aim of the editors is to 'de-mystify' research and in this it

succeeds admirably. The editors have chosen papers which show a great diversity of approaches differing in emphasis on description or explanation, different degrees of structure in design and different appeals to the authority of science or the authenticity of emphatic exploration. This book provides a good introduction for the uninitiated to reading and performing research. Evidence-based practice is now seen as central to the development of nursing as a profession. The book and the whole research show the typical limitations of small-scale projects carried out with limited resources and the experience of applied research as it occurs in practice, as opposed to how it tends to look when discussed in textbooks. This book could be very useful to student nurses, nurses in clinical practice and the entire range of caring professionals.

The book is organised into three sections, representing three distinct types of social science and nursing research: i) observing and participating, ii) talking to people and asking questions and iii) controlled trials and comparisons of the structure of professional practice. An editorial introduction is provided for each section. The studies in the first section contain three chapters about observation research and the first one by Mavis Kirkham is about participant observation of women in labour and the prenatal wards of a hospital. She was seen by the other participants as a natural member of the setting, even though she declared her role as a researcher. The second chapter is Julia Cayne's account of collaborative staff development. The third chapter by Nick James is an extended 'reflexive account' of research which she, a nurse, has carried out on nursing. It demonstrates graphically that research is not a separate thing from the researcher's life, the more so when she does her research in an area which matters to her and in which she already has a role to play. This kind of research is central to good professional care.

In the second section the researcher examines different ways of talking to people and asking questions, and looks more specifically at the use of vignettes – fictional cases – as a way of exploring policy and practice ethically and without intruding into people's lives. Two studies report on the results of a commissioned questionnaire study on community care for older and handicapped people carried out in the county of Cornwall. The questionnaires were