

Book review

Ruth Chambers, Gill Wakley, Steve Field and Simon Ellis 2002: *Appraisal for the apprehensive – a guide for doctors*. Abingdon: Radcliffe Medical Press. 216 pp. £24.95. ISBN 1-85775-982-6.

Although appraisal for doctors in the NHS has been a contractual obligation for many doctors working in the UK since April 2001, and for most since April 2003, the impetus for successful appraisal has been very much strengthened by the General Medical Council's (GMC) recent publication of 'A Licence to Practice and Revalidation' (April 2003).

It is evident, at least anecdotally, that the rollout of appraisal among General Practitioners in the UK has been patchy. There are differences in the managerial and practical approaches to appraisal between the four different home countries. This book is therefore a timely summary of some of the processes involved in appraisal of doctors and a potential reassurance, for many, of the methodologies of accruing information and addressing learning needs.

Although the authors recognize, at an early stage in the book, the differences between appraisal processes in the four home countries of UK and Northern Ireland, the book deals largely with common principles that relate to generic appraisal of doctors. Where specific general practice issues are addressed, they relate predominantly to the English model.

The book is divided into two main parts: the first being an overview of appraisal and preparation for appraisal.

These early chapters are particularly useful in including commentary; scenarios and sound bites from individuals who have themselves experienced the appraisal process in an NHS context. Most of these would, I feel, be reassuring to the reader in terms of the benefits and experience of appraisal.

The second part relates largely to the seven key headings of the GMC's *Good Medical Practice* and suggests a formulaic approach to addressing learning needs and learning plans in each category.

In several of the chapters, educational tools are described that can assist doctors in identifying learning needs and addressing these needs.

A five-stage plan is described as a generic approach to preparing for appraisal. The first stage of the five stage-plan within each chapter lists criteria derived from *Good Medical Practice* in each of the key heading sections.

Although there is substantial detail of the criteria involved in providing good standards of practice (stage 1), the detail of the nature of evidence that an individual doctor may collate in order to demonstrate these standards (or competencies) is less detailed. The subsequent four stages include 2) identifying learning needs 3) prioritising and defining learning objectives, 4) making an action plan with a timetable and 5) evaluating progress.

It could be argued that the final chapter ('Make a logical plan to achieve revalidation through successful appraisals') could stand-alone as a separate part of the book. This section deals in more detail with the relationship between doctor and appraiser in practical terms. The need to demonstrate standards in each of the seven areas highlighted in *Good Medical Practice* attracts more detail in this section (under the heading 'Verification' in a very useful tabulated format). The table also provides useful tips under the heading 'Assumptions and Risks', which identifies potential pitfalls in the appraisal process.

This is a useful introductory book to the process of appraisal for doctors working in the NHS. The emphasis of the book is largely on educational aspects of appraisal, which is a very positive feature of the authors' approach. Whilst these features represent the strengths of the book, if it has a weakness, it is in the relative lack of information for readers on the nature of evidence that would be useful in supporting appraisal and thus linking successfully with revalidation.

Dr Malcolm Lewis
Director of Postgraduate Medical Education for
General Practice
University of Wales College of Medicine
Cardiff, UK