

Book reviews

Middleton, J. 2000: *The team guide to communication*. Oxford: Radcliffe Medical Press. 212 pp. £19.95. ISBN 1 85775 411 5.

In the first chapter, John Middleton says of Roger Neighbour's writing, 'if you like 'knight's move' associations (anything from art to Chinese philosophy), you'll probably enjoy his writing'. He then goes on to say: 'Such eclecticism reminds me of the different musical styles of Igor Stravinsky. Perhaps I'm just as bad (don't answer that).'

Middleton may know Neighbour well (he certainly refers to his material a lot), but the proverb about 'people in glasshouses' etched itself in my cortex as I read this book on 'a team guide to communication'. It is a very chatty book, full of one-sentence paragraphs such as 'Cheer up! We'll cope, we always do – there are ways. Read on'. This sentence is taken out of a section on the effect of stress on communication skills, where Berne's work on the 'games people play' is also cited as background material to the constant 'moaning' activity that health professionals are (according to the author) fond of exhibiting. It is clearly a work rooted in a general practitioner's mindset, yet I found Middleton's style easy to read – bordering on lighthearted conversation, in fact. The mix of short paragraphs, plentiful boxes and exercises breaks the sections into chunks that make the book a breeze to scan and digest.

Depending on your personal take on these issues, this is either an engaging way of introducing an audience to the work of Byrne and Long, Pendleton, Stott and Davies, Tuckett, Silverman and Kurtz, Stewart and Schön or, if you adopt more of a gourmet attitude to these things, a microwave-ready-type serving of the work that Middleton uses as the basis of his text. The main idea that runs through the volume is the 'face' model of communication, presumably a Middleton design, as it was not cited to any other source. The eyes of the face are boxes that portray the differing agendas of the interactive players. An upturned isosceles triangle represents communication skills, and the mouth is (usually) another rectangle that denotes a negotiated and mutually acceptable plan.

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This motif recurs in the book, with many examples drawn from the primary care contexts of differing agendas resulting in agreed solutions.

I must admit that the title foxed me slightly. I kept looking for 'team' issues (communication to improve team functioning and productivity), but the book was somewhat lightweight in this area, although the 'norming, storming' model appears, as do the ideas of Janis on the dangers of groupthink. There are chapters on assessment, reflective practice and difficult situations, together with appendices that provide a model video consent form and the Consultation Satisfaction Questionnaire (courtesy of the Ely Lilly National Clinical Audit Centre).

If one was to quibble, one could find errors in the references, but this is not really a text for quibblers. Rather it is an introduction to communication skills, presented in a conversational style, which reveals a breadth of connected reading ranging from Sartre to Bion, and from Laing to Freud. Eat your heart out Neighbour, and watch your back.

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Williams, A. 2000: *Nursing, medicine and primary care*. Buckingham: Open University Press. 101 pp. £15.99. ISBN 0 335 20167 9.

This book describes research conducted by the National Primary Care R&D Centre into the cultural differences between medicine and nursing. However, it is much more than a research report, providing a fascinating and timely exploration of the professional interrelationships that will shape the future delivery of health services in primary care.

Bonnie Sibbald's excellent chapter on the background and policy issues in primary care provides an essential context for the research, and the discussions arising from it, although it stops at a point

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before the implementation of primary care groups. The history and development of general practitioners are described with a clarity and detail that will be useful to those readers who are not familiar with the drivers and imperatives of general practice. The history of primary health care team-working is another clear and invaluable reprise for readers facing the new imperatives for integrated working in primary care trusts and groups.

There are some variations in the timescale of the book. Chapter 1 is only able to speculate about primary care groups, while a later chapter refers to research on nurse practitioners published in April 2000, but does not address nurse practitioner-led PMS pilots in the context of a discussion about role substitution and the potential for nurses to run their own practices. However, such anomalies are difficult to avoid in a fast-changing world, and they do not detract from the fascinating and thoughtful discussion of the research findings, and their implications.

This book is recommended for anyone with a professional or managerial interest in primary care, as new organizations bring doctors and nurses into closer professional proximity than ever before.

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Rummery, K. and Glendinning, C. 2000: *Primary care and Social Services*. National Primary Care Research and Development Centre Series. Oxford: Radcliffe Medical Press. 128 pp. £15.95 (PB). ISBN 1 857775 466 2.

This compact paperback was written to help health and social care professionals to provide effective and efficient services for older people by developing stronger partnerships and innovative ways of working together. In particular, it concentrates on the hitherto neglected area of primary and community health services planning and purchasing with Social Services. Although it is not based on the authors' own research, they draw on recent studies relevant to each of the topics. It is parti-

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cularly gratifying that a patient perspective runs throughout the book.

Previous experience of joint commissioning by primary health and social care is described and reviewed in Chapter 2, including both the barriers to and opportunities for joint commissioning confronting primary care groups and trusts and local authorities as organizations. Joint working, on a day-to-day basis, between individual professionals in social and health care teams is examined in Chapter 3. Both barriers to success and factors associated with success are identified and discussed using specific examples by way of illustration. Much debate has taken place concerning the advantages and drawbacks of attaching Social Services professionals to primary care settings. The authors make a valuable contribution to this debate using contemporary examples. Aware of the pressure to evaluate services and policy as well as clinical interventions, the authors include a short chapter outlining strategies for evaluating and monitoring partnerships and collaborations.

The book closes by describing the changes that are currently taking place in the organization and funding of the National Health Service and Local Authorities, and it then outlines the authors' speculations with regard to the impact of these changes on the services for older people.

In order to produce chapters that are complete in themselves, the book can therefore feel repetitive. The book is based on research evidence, but the projects tend to be pilot studies that are small and pragmatic in design, and for a nonacademic readership it might have been wise to point out, as a caution, that the findings cannot be regarded as definitive.

Having said that, it is a well laid out book, and the key points at the end of each section are particularly helpful. Health and Social Services professionals at all levels who are involved in the care of older people would be well advised to read this thorough analysis of partnership and collaboration.

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