Complex questions in the art of evidence-based practice

Evidence-Based Health Promotion is an excellent book, concerned with the art of the possible. It claims to increase the skills and confidence of professionals involved in health promotion by encouraging them to adopt an evidence-based approach to their work. The book would be a valuable resource for any library or setting in which staff or students are engaged in health promotion.

Although this is not a text of instructions about how to deliver evidence-based health promotion, the book does examine the complex implications of evidence-based practice. Chapters include a lively discussion of the most appropriate ways to provide health promotion based on sound evidence.

The contributors help to inform practice by reinforcing the professional standpoint and encouraging realistic expectations, an open-minded and reflective attitude and the development of support networks in the field.

Designed to be dipped into according to the reader's needs or interests, the book is divided into three parts: theories of evidence-based practice; evidence-based work settings; and gathering, assessing and using evidence. Readers will discover how to assess existing evidence, how to collect new evidence and how to find practical solutions in situations where there is no evidence.

The topics covered range from monitoring and evaluation in cardiac rehabilitation, child accident prevention, workplace stress and integrating research into nursing practice. Some sections of this book are presented through personal accounts and opinions of practitioners, while other sections will help readers to consider the underlying issues.

Jennifer Percival RGN, RM, HV Cert, London

Unequal Partners, User Groups and Community Care
Marion Barnes, Stephen Harrison, Maggie Mort, Polly Shardlow (Editors)
The Policy Press
114pp
£13.99
This important book reports on a research study designed to examine the strategies and impact of self-advocacy agencies and user groups on the joint planning and provision of mental health and disability services. As well as exploring the views of staff working in these two sectors, the study examines the perspectives of self-organised user groups.

The researchers' aims were two-fold: to describe the relationship between user group activity and new forms of agency management as defined in the 1991 NHS and Community Care Act, and to identify the notions of consumerism and citizenship so as to understand better the importance of user groups.

The book presents a complex subject in an easy to read form. It begins with a description of the policy context of user involvement in service development. The authors then describe the study design and methodology, and compare and contrast the impact of user groups on health and social care services.

The authors are particularly interested in the the continued imbalance of power between users and professionals. The study also examines how groups can empower themselves so that they see themselves not only as consumers but as citizens active in achieving change.

This is an interesting and worthwhile read for health and social policy makers, practitioners, lobby and pressure groups, students and academics as well as users. It contains significant messages and lessons, particularly in the area of local governance.

Rosemary Tidy RNMM, Kent

The Symptom Sorter
Keith Hopcroft, Vincent Forte Radcliffe Medical Press
395pp
£19.95
Once in a while, a book is published that hits the proverbial nail on the head in its applicability to clinical practice and this book is one of them.

Written by two practising GPs, it provides a clear and logical approach that will be an aid to any nurse involved in physical assessment. Although nurse practitioners in primary health care are the target audience, this is a practical resource for any nurse developing their diagnostic skills.

The book is presented in a user-friendly and accessible style. For example, differential diagnoses are ranked by their relationship to the relevant symptoms. The section on possible investigations and information tips offers direction for action, while a list of 'red flags' highlights danger areas or pitfalls in the diagnostic process.

Symptoms are indexed according to body region so the book provides a rapid reference source to be accessed at leisure - or while your patient is undressing behind the screens!

My only criticism is that in the pursuit of brevity, there is sometimes an excessive use of abbreviations which requires reference to other sources for interpretation.

Despite this, it is a highly readable, applicable text for practice and must be recommended as an aid to the development of diagnostic skills.

Stuart Cable MSC, BA(Hons), RGN, Dundee

The Sun Know How pack, the Health Education Authority's campaign to prevent skin cancer, is available from the Health Education Authority, Trevelyn House, 30 Great Peter Street, London SW1P 2HW. Tel: 0171 222 5300.

The Society of Expert Witnesses has launched its website at: http://www.sew.org.uk