
BOOK REVIEWS

Teaching And Learning Communication Skills In Medicine (Second Edition).

Jonathon Silverman, Suzanne Kurtz and Juliet Draper. Radcliffe 2004. £27.95. Pp 280. ISBN No. 1-875775-640-1.

The consultation is central to all forms of clinical practice. Apparently it has been estimated that doctors may perform 200,000 consultations in a professional lifetime so it is a cause for some concern that 54% of patients' complaints and 45% of their concerns are not elicited in this process. It is also revealing that doctors overestimate the time they devote to explanation and planning in the consultation by up to 900%. The figures are not mine but are presented along with a host of other data to support the authors' view that dedicating time and resources to improving communication skills is worthwhile.

This book and its companion "*Skills for Communicating with Patients*" were originally published in 1998. The second edition has updated both the research evidence throughout the book and the Calgary-Cambridge Guides which will be familiar to many GP Trainers. At first sight it is a daunting prospect running to three hundred pages but on the whole it is very readable and broken down into three distinct sections.

Part One covers "the why", "the what" and "the how" of teaching communication skills. I found the "why" chapter one of the less readable sections. This is mainly because it contains lists of examples of research to support the premise that better communication skills can improve the outcome of the consultation. To be fair to the authors, they do state that these are included in order to generate greater interest in the research base which is expanded on in the companion volume. The chapter on "the what" introduces the framework of the Calgary-Cambridge Guides with a graphical representation of the consultation. This consists of five key tasks carried out in temporal sequence by the clinician and the two threads of "providing structure" and "building the relationship" which occur continuously throughout the consultation. Sadly this is expanded to a total of 71 process skills which will make most trainers and students pause for thought. The "how" chapter will be familiar to most GP Trainers emphasising as it does the importance of experiential learning. However, it seems to be aimed more at undergraduate or group teaching with great emphasis on simulated patients or role play which will be of limited use for training the individual registrar in practice.

Part Two was for me the most interesting section of the book. The Agenda Led Outcome-Based Analysis (ALOA) method of reviewing consultations and giving feedback offers a refreshingly different way to approach teaching consultation skills. The emphasis on descriptive non-judgemental feedback aims to allow the learner to reflect and develop their own ideas rather than simply adopt solutions provided by the teacher or the group. It also allows teaching sessions to more easily target specific areas of the consultation rather than the lengthier strengths and weaknesses approach more familiar to Pendleton devotees. The rest of the section combines advice on providing feedback, facilitation of learning and basic concepts of adult learning which will be useful to teachers in all areas of their work.

Part Three takes the reader through the process of constructing a communication skills curriculum. Although this is potentially useful, the target audience seems to be those involved in undergraduate teaching or those working with groups of learners. I suspect it will be of little relevance to the majority of individual GP Trainers.

Overall I enjoyed this book despite its length. In language it successfully straddles the Atlantic divide although phrases such as "Value the interview as a gift of raw material for the group" did make me wince a little bit. I would strongly recommend it for all GP Trainers. New trainers will find it provides a comprehensive approach to the subject and may find that it complements the teaching on their trainers' course. More experienced trainers may be looking for new approaches to teaching in the consultation particularly with experienced registrars where there is a need to focus in on specific areas of concern. Discussing alternative methods of analysing the consultation appears to be a popular GPEC topic in my experience. Some knowledge of the methods included in this book might come in useful.

Col RJ Bisset
L/RAMC

A Surgical Artist At War. MKH Crumplin and P Starling. Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh & Army Medical Services Museum 2005. £14.99. Ppvi-96. Illust. ISBN No. 0-95462131-X.

The paintings of Sir Charles Bell hang in the museum of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh and many Members and Fellows of that college will remember glimpsing these splendid watercolours as a callow youth anxiously struggling to satisfy the viva voce examiners. This reviewer is no exception.

This book, with Peter Starling as an author, brings together 32 of Bell's paintings in which he strikingly depicts the military wounds of the early nineteenth century from the Battles of La Coruna and Waterloo. Each picture is accompanied by the artist's comments and some clinical details whilst the authors have added commentaries of modern interpretations of pathophysiology, management and historical context. In addition there is a potted biography of Sir Charles Bell and a variety of other historical vignettes dotted around the book.

Many of Bell's paintings are striking in the extreme; a soldier, his back arched in the agony of tetanus, cerebral herniation through a cranial gunshot wound and traumatic amputation of the upper limb from cannon shot. They vividly illustrate the pathology of the time – now mostly of historical interest only – and remind modern military surgeons of their heritage and taxing nature of such surgery. The wounds and the facilities available to treat them may have changed but the challenges of surgery in an austere environment remain.

All in all this is a fascinating book that will be of interest to anyone with an interest in military surgical history....or those who simply wish to have a closer look at the paintings they merely glanced at as they fled the examination hall in Edinburgh!

Maj JP Garner RAMC
Specialist Registrar in General Surgery

The British Military Surgery Pocket Book HMSO Crown Copyright 2004 AC No. 12552 and Emergency War Surgery Third United States revision 2004. Department of Defence USA.

It is perhaps iniquitous to review these two books together as there is the inevitable temptation to compare them – however, as both books are in general excellent and criticisms minor a dual review saves much repetition. Both are complete rewrites of longstanding 'bibles' of military surgery – the British one replacing the 1981 edition and the American one a 1988 edition – so revision would seem long overdue. The battles we now wage have changed considerably in the intervening 20 years and so the casualties we might expect and treatments we can administer have changed also.

Both books deal in some depth with the pathophysiology of military trauma, organisation of care and general topics such as triage before dealing with specific injuries on a regional basis. The level of illustrations is uniformly high and the detail of operative procedures is sufficient to allow most surgeons to follow the instructions and work

outside of their normal 'comfort zone'. Damage control surgery is well covered in both texts reflecting its emerging importance in trauma surgery and increasing relevance to military practice. There are two areas included in the US version which do not appear in the UK edition. The British book does not cover obstetric and gynaecological surgery at all, which I think is unfortunate, and the US edition has a useful chapter tucked away at the end entitled 'Care of Enemy Prisoners of War/Internees' which acts as a useful aide memoire for our ethical and legal obligations, including a section on medical photography.

Where I think the British book scores highly is the marginal comments, which are there almost as anecdote but provide common sense advice for difficult situations outside of the format of formal didactic prose.

The most obvious quibble about both texts is that they are not handbooks or pocket books – these are serious textbooks and would fit comfortably in no pocket I possess. As to format, it depends on individual preference – the British one relies on standard military format whilst the US version uses bullet points and boxes in perhaps a slightly more inviting style, but both are highly readable and the information contained easily accessible. I would not want to go to war without one of them as they provide a massive source of guidance for virtually any military surgical situation.

Maj JP Garner RAMC
Specialist Registrar in General Surgery

A Dangerous Practice. Daniel Haines. The Memoir Club 2005. £19.50. Pp 158. HB. ISBN No. 1-84104-118-1.

This book aims to provide a unique perspective of the life of a husband and wife team of doctors and their children, in peace and wartime Falkland Islands. From the onset it becomes clear that the author wants to set the record straight on what life was like in that part of the world some 8000 miles away from the UK. He cuts straight to the point and takes no prisoners as he describes his dislike for the Governor and Argentine Forces; this is rather unusual as he also claims to be a practicing Christian. Can he not learn to forgive?

Overall the book is riddled with honest views and reflection of how life really was at an important time in history. It is supported by funny anecdotes of how they lived under occupation. I could actually visualise the RAF pilots identifying friendly civilians by the flying Bra and Knickers! It also movingly commends in full measure the British Forces who liberated them. If this book was about an American conflict they would make a block buster out of it. It's an enjoyable read

and if it was committed to screen I have no doubt would make a good film.

Capt Raymond Jolly RAMC

Adolescents and Sex. Sara Bekaert. Radcliffe Publishing 2005. £21.95. Pp 180. ISBN No. 1-85775-880-3.

Adolescents are a vulnerable group of population who go through major physical physiological and emotional changes and will need plenty of support during this period of their lives. This book has been written with the intention of providing basic information for those professionals who provide support services for this group of population.

This is a well written book with 180 pages containing 10 chapters and 12 appendices. The initial few chapters discuss the various physical, emotional and psychological changes the adolescents undergo and the tasks and risks they face and the skills and knowledge the professionals and parents need to support the adolescents. There is a detailed chapter on teenage pregnancy which discusses the various social factors associated with the increased incidence of teenage pregnancies in the UK, compared to the rest

of Europe, and the various measures that can be taken to improve the early unexpected pregnancies. There is a useful and detailed chapter on contraception which also includes basic anatomy and physiology of the reproductive system and the various means of contraception and the usefulness of the emergency pill as an effective contraception. There is also information, in detail, on the various common sexually transmitted diseases and sexual health and on marginised groups of adolescents in whom there is an increased incidence of teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and sexual abuse. The last chapter of the book discusses how to set up a young person's clinic and how the present services can be improved.

In short, I find this book very useful, written in simple English and it should be available for a quick reference for adolescents and the various professionals who are working with young persons such as teachers, nurses and social workers.

Col B Moorthy MD FRCP FRCPCH
L/RAMC
Consultant Paediatrician