

# BOOKSHELF



## A Handbook for Clinical Teachers

D. Newble and R. Cannon

MTP Press, Lancaster (1983)

148 pages. Price £7.95

Not being a clinical teacher myself, it seemed like a good idea to review this book; if ever I were to think of teaching clinical students (and who of us in the current state of the universities can be sure of anything a year or two hence), would I purchase a book like this?

The low price would undoubtedly attract me, although I would wonder whether a pound or two more could have been saved in paperback form. Books on teaching are, rightly or wrongly, perceived as of the lowest priority by most clinicians and academics; the marginal effect of a few pounds is thus large.

The book is attractively produced, in a large format, with broadly-spaced print and wide margins filled with cartoons, many of which are, however, of dubious relevance to the text. The book could probably have been a pocket-sized paperback if condensed—but as the authors then imply, it would be less likely to be read. Packaging is important in education.

There are seven chapters on common teaching problems: lectures; presentations at meetings; small-group teaching; practical and clinical skills; planning courses; assessment; and preparation of materials.

Much of what is said appears to be little more than commonsense when it is put in black and white; but since commonsense is often neither common nor sensible, this is perhaps a useful exercise. There are of course banalities; two chapters begin "This chapter assumes that you have been asked to give a lecture". Bad start! But perhaps not as bad as lecturing when you have not actually been asked to.

The strengths of this book are that it provides ideas, many of which may well be novel to teachers, or perhaps once known about and subsequently forgotten.

*Medical Teacher* Vol 6 No 3 1984

The descriptions of 'snow-balling' and 'brain-storming' for small groups, and the use of video for teaching clinical skills fit well into this category. The weaknesses seem two-fold. First, there is perhaps too little emphasis upon the important role of teaching (as opposed to self-study from books, or whatever) in helping students to understand the ideas behind the subject, and hence to gain an adequate perspective of a field. If properly done, this can be worth a dozen books and take a fraction of the time. Otherwise, teaching may just be seen as just another route for long-term retention of yet more facts. The second weakness is in helping the potential teacher when things go wrong. What does one do with an obstreperous student who continually asks awkward or stupid questions; with a lecture that is plainly going to over-run its time; with a lecture that starts 20 minutes late because the fire-alarm bell has gone off; with the demonstration that has gone dreadfully wrong; or even with an attempted attack by the Rag Week's 'Custard-Pie Hit Squad'? In clinical teaching the potential is far worse. I still relish the embarrassment of a fairly senior surgeon who was confidently using sigmoidoscopy to demonstrate a rectal stricture which was "as tight as the cervix uteri"; when biopsy was attempted it rapidly became obvious that this *was* the cervix uteri. But how does one salvage that situation? Or should one?

I. C. McManus

## The Impact of CME

Larry Chambers, Dave Davis, et al.

Program in CME, Faculty of Health Sciences, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada (1983)

Unpaginated. Price \$15.00

This is an annotated bibliography of studies assessing the impact of continuing medical education on physicians. It uses a variant of the elegant technique another McMaster group used brilliantly to produce the single best resource on compliance.<sup>1</sup> It does so less effectively, but still usefully. A careful literature search found 179 articles from 1935 to 1981. Then a valuable set of assessment criteria were devised, and used to score each reported study for such factors as quality of design, details of educational intervention, means of evaluation, outcome measures, and educational significance. The section describing these criteria is valuable reading for anyone considering research in or evaluation of CME. There follows an annotated listing of each article, with a

summary and their scores on the eight criteria. It would have been more useful had the scores been given in more detail, since one design out of four does not tell us which detail provided that one point, and which components were missing.

The bibliography is followed by a series of tables that list the articles by type of evaluation (for example, by study design), by dates of publication and there is a ranked list of the journals in which they appeared. There is also a more detailed and handy chart tabling articles which report positive changes in knowledge, skills, or attitudes; in behaviour of health professionals, or in patient outcome. This is followed by author and topic indexes.

This is unquestionably a valuable and unique resource for the expert in medical education research and evaluation. What it sadly lacks, unlike the superb Compliance study, is any text which uses the knowledge this group gathered, to draw conclusions as to the efficacy of CME and its methods. This is semi-cooked data (neither raw-data nor half-baked) but incomplete, and unsatisfying for its lack of interpretations and conclusions. The lack of any list of articles showing negative outcomes is thought-provoking, though it may reflect the profoundly unhelpful and unworthy bias of editors against publishing important negative results. Sadly, the copy I saw was so perfunctorily bound that it rapidly degenerated into loose leaves; as it is also punched for ring-binding, however, the situation is retrievable, though rendered difficult by the failure to number the pages. One hopes the format will be used to provide updating supplements in the future.

Michael Simpson

## Reference

<sup>1</sup>Haynes RB, Taylor DW, Sackett DL (eds). *Compliance in health care*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1979.

## The Aims of College Teaching

Kenneth E. Eble

Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco (1983)

xviii + 187 pages. Price £35.00

I must admit to having approached this book with some sceptical interest, which arose from noting that the author comes from The University of Utah, Salt Lake City. I associate this particular locale with a certain kind of evangelical spirit which often manifested itself during my childhood in pairs of earnest young American men knocking on my parents' front door with the intention of convert-