

Building Better Health: A handbook of behavioural change

By C. David Jenkins. Published by Pan American Health Organisation, Washington DC, 2003. Paperback, 378 pages with index. ISBN 92 75 11590 7. **Reviewed by Uta Dietrich**

This book has been put together from contributions by many professionals and contains a wealth of information. It is written in a style that is easy to understand and gives many examples from a variety of countries. Also very useful are the links (also see chapter...) to continue on a specific topic elsewhere in the book. When skimming through the book, boxes of bold sentences on many pages help the reader to quickly find key messages.

The author has identified people from different countries, professions in and outside of health, and community members as the target group for this book. This is a very diverse audience and, as a result, not all information is relevant. For the Australian reader, examples using diseases not common in this country are interesting but local ones might have been more relevant.

The book is divided into four parts:

Part 1, General Principle of Health Promotion and Disease Prevention. This uses the epidemiological triangle of agent, host and environment to explain the principles of intervention. It is a useful overview that stresses that successful interventions require specific strategies for selected target groups.

Part 2, Improving Health Throughout the Lifecycle. This is an extensive overview of the health issues facing different age groups and a good first reading with additional references provided at the end of the book. Mental as well as physical health issues are explored. Some issues are covered in more detail than others, including options for primary, secondary and tertiary prevention and specific checklists for health professionals.

Part 3, Better Understanding the Leading Forms of Death and Disability. When discussing leading causes of morbidity and mortality, chronic diseases, including heart disease and cancer, and injuries are discussed as well as brain and behavioural disorders including mental health. This last section is excellent. There are very few texts that include mental health issues in such depth. Given that it is estimated that 20% of the population suffers from a mental disorder at any time, this is a very positive inclusion.

Part 4, Intervening more Effectively. At the beginning of this

part, the author reviews some of the ethical issues of behaviour change. This is a very interesting topic that many books do not consider. Two main issues raised are: changing practices in other cultures; and personal freedom to an unhealthy lifestyle as long as it does not harm others. The book does not prescribe an answer, but asks the reader to consider ethical issues before planning any interventions. It recommends involving the community in planning to develop an effective intervention, but also to obtain the community's view on ethical issues. Four further principles for intervening are valuing people and their culture, offering choices, developing informed consent, and keeping outcomes open to everyone involved.

After reviewing a number of theories and giving examples of interventions, part 4 concludes with a chapter on poverty, which is introduced with a statement that "poverty is a basic force of risk for perhaps 90% of the most common diseases and disabilities" (p. 324). The author continues that "simple low-technology behavioural changes that advance biologic and behavioural health are a basic wedge to break the cycle of poverty" (p. 325). The author acknowledges that other key issues to reduce poverty are "education, available jobs, adequate housing, community safety, health-building, and overcoming helplessness and hopelessness" (p. 325).

Given the knowledge and experience in Australia around addressing equity in health, interventions around overcoming helplessness and hopelessness may be a more successful first intervention than behaviour change around the traditional chronic disease risk factors.

The book concludes with the following statement: "healthy people can travel this road more successfully than sick and troubled ones". It recognises that often, interventions are most effective with worried well and to reach those most in need special efforts and approaches are required.

In summary, this is a very stimulating book with a wealth of information that can be expected from a handbook. Health professionals in clinical settings, specifically community health, would find it helpful. For health promotion professionals, it gives detail on behaviour change, as the title says, but lacks detail on the other key components of health promotion work around policy development and environmental change.

Reviewer

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The Health of Indigenous Australians

Edited by Neil Thomson. Published by Oxford University Press, Melbourne, January 2004. Paperback, 519 pages with index. RRP \$A69.95/\$NZ85. ISBN 0195512200.

Reviewed by Ian Raymond

The Health of Indigenous Australians is an important book because it provides the most comprehensive coverage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health to date. Professor Neil Thomson has been actively involved in collecting and reporting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health over many years and is well respected and qualified in this area. His expertise is evident in this book and he is complemented by an number of expert contributors who give the book the credibility it deserves.

The information is considered to be reliable, essential and comprehensive by both the public health and community controlled health sectors. The information was collected from numerous credible sources including published and unpublished material, recognised journal articles, books, reports, theses, and government bodies such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

The book caters for a range of people who “make decisions about Indigenous health – from policy makers and senior program managers to health professionals to base their decision on the best information available”.

The information will be useful to assist in policy development and health planning, as reference material, statistical and epidemiological uses and general interest. The book provides

an up-to-date perspective on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and draws attention to the main health areas of concern and their contributing factors. The information is quite detailed and is appropriately presented for the targeted audience.

There is no doubt that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health data has been under-reported and inaccurate. This book seems to provide the most updated and accurate perspective based on information collected dating back to the early 1980s.

In each chapter, readers will find detailed historical and epidemiological reporting of the main diseases afflicting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today, typically describing patterns of the disease, types (where applicable), comparative data to the general population, contributing factors, prevalence, research, reporting and recent approaches and initiatives planned to address the particular health concern. Readers will be pleased to find these approaches and initiatives for effective prevention and management of these diseases are based on evidence.

These health concerns or diseases are also linked to other contributory factors such as the structural, spiritual, social, environmental and biological, providing an overall and comprehensive status report on the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Overall, the book is recommended for people who make decisions in Aboriginal health policy development and effective and sustainable health service delivery

Reviewer

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