

## Book Reviews

### **Epidemiology in Health Care – Third edition**

BARBARA VALANIS

Appleton & Lange (1999)

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This excellent text book is a real asset for nurses and for other health professions wishing to master basic epidemiological techniques and skills. Edited by Barbara Valanis, this book gives a comprehensive introduction to epidemiology, but still retaining a “down to earth approach”. The writing style is very accessible.

The book has been put together by at least nine contributors, remarkably all women and professional nurses. The authors share examples and show the readers how to apply their logical step-by-step approach to analyse and solve problems.

It contains three main sections, each of which addresses a particular aspect of epidemiology:

Section I consists of chapters 1 to 7 and deals with all the basic fundamental principles in epidemiology in a very clear and understanding way. Chapter 1 explains the important aspects of epidemiology and how this field has developed. In a nutshell it deals with the question “What epidemiology is all about”. Different basic concepts of epidemiology such as the natural history of disease, the agent – host-environment interaction, the disease process, levels of prevention and causality of disease is dealt with in a practical way in chapter 2. Chapter 3 deals with quantitative measures of risk factors and states of health and other outcomes by using rates. The conceptual basis of rates and the different types of rates are discussed in detail. Chapter 4, the chapter on epidemiological methods, provides an overview of epidemiological investigation and then discusses the theory on the different study designs as well as the strengths and weaknesses of each type, concluding with approaches to epidemiological research. The focus in chapter 5 is on the changes in patterns of health and disease, the influence of economic and social changes on shifts in the health and demographic characteristics and the constant changing of the health status of populations due to population dynamics. Chapter 6 emphasizes the different methods of investigation and control of infectious diseases, using the principles discussed in chapter 2, concluding with the methods of investigation of an outbreak. A similar approach, but with emphasis on the control of diseases of non-infectious etiology is discussed in chapter 7.

I think if a student can have a good knowledge of chapters 1 to 7, he/she will be well equipped to deal with everyday basic epidemiological problems.

Section II – chapters 8 through 11 – presents data on major causes of morbidity and mortality in different stages of life. (One would however appreciate more worldwide trends and not only emphasizing the trends in the USA). Chapter 8 emphasizes the trends in reproductive health and childbearing (again emphasizing only the USA trends) and the risk factors that may affect reproductive health. Chapter 9 presents the patterns and causes of mortality and morbidity among children and adolescents. It also emphasizes the influence of factors like sex, race

and age on mortality and looking at common acute and chronic diseases in childhood and how to prevent them. Chapter 10 summarizes the causes for morbidity and mortality in the young and middle adulthood with emphasis on the prevention of the common diseases in this age group and specific health promotion. Chapter 11 deals with the last population group in this section, the persons over 65 years of age. Again the different common diseases and how to prevent them is discussed.

A short summary of trends in these four stages of life in other countries, e.g. third world countries would be very valuable for students outside of the USA. A viewpoint of prevention of these diseases on a global scale and global (WHO) programs would add to the comprehensiveness of these chapters.

Section III—chapters 12 to 16—deals with different applications of epidemiology and disease control. Chapter 12 discussing the ethiology and natural history of a disease, emphasizing the importance of certain concepts like disease process, multi-factorial diseases, the using of information on natural history in clinical practice and the application of the levels of prevention. Chapter 13 focuses on disease control and surveillance, with emphasis on the planning, implementing and evaluating of surveillance systems. A very good chapter on screening is found in chapter 14, where different aspects of screening as part of secondary prevention is discussed, e.g. definitions, characteristics of screening tests, criteria for screening programs, program planning and practical guidelines. Chapter 15 deals with clinical issues that one often finds in research, e.g. normality vs. abnormality and selection of treatment. Chapter 16 concludes with aspects of health planning and evaluation.

This book describes epidemiology in a way that difficult concepts can easily be understood and should be an excellent textbook in epidemiology for pre-graduate medical, nursing and other students in the health professions.

Looking at the quality of this textbook, one is not surprised that it is already reaching its third edition.

BRENDA DE KLERK, MBChB, DTM&H, DPH, DOH  
*Lecturer – Department of Community Health  
 Faculty of Health Sciences  
 University of the Free State  
 Bloemfontein,  
 Republic of South Africa*

**Body Image: A Handbook of Theory, Research, and Clinical Practice**

THOMAS F. CASH & THOMAS PRUZINSKY

The Guilford Press, New York (2002)

530 pp., ISBN 1-57230-777-3

This book is an excellent handbook and reference guide for all scholars, researchers and clinicians working in the field of human sciences. *Over the course of body image scholarship, body experience has been viewed as a fundamental construct for understanding human functioning. This vital role of body image means it has the potential to dramatically influence our quality of life.*

Edited by Cash and Pruzinsky, the handbook covers all developmental, psychological and socio-cultural aspects of body image from the conceptual and historical foundations of body image to applicable clinical interventions. It also takes account of the relevance of body image issues in medical contexts such as dermatology, oncology and dentistry.

It is a thorough and comprehensive handbook which was contributed to by 71 professionals who are not only experts in their fields but who apply sound empirical reasoning in evaluating relevant research. The book is divided into nine sections of which the content of each is extensive without being tedious. The writing style is accessible.

The first section of the book discusses historical and modern conceptual foundations of body image. The problem of defining the body image construct as reflected by the number of existing definitions of the term 'body image', is examined. The authors comment on the isolation and lack of integration between the diverse lines of thinking and research on body image.

*In creating this handbook, our intention is to lessen the isolation by bringing together a diverse group of experts to share their insights into body image with current and future body image scholars.*

The next section describes the development of body image throughout different life stages presenting it as *a fluid and dynamic person-situation interaction* rather than *a static cross-situational trait*. The etiological factors in the development of body image concerns such as the family, media, interpersonal relationships and sexual abuse are also discussed.

The section on Body Image Assessment is extremely valuable to any researcher or clinician. It examines the wide range of measures for the assessment of aspects of body image and discusses the methodological strengths and weaknesses of each. Information is schematically presented in tabular form, which makes it very useful.

In the fourth section, individual and cultural differences in body image are analysed. The role of gender and ethnicity is explored and as in previous chapters the socio-cultural disposition of girls to develop a normative discontent with their body experiences is highlighted. Research across the spectrum seems to indicate that African Americans have greater body image satisfaction than Caucasian-, Asian- or Hispanic Americans.

Section five examines body image dysfunctions and disorders. The prevalence of body image disturbances among patients with anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa is discussed and empirical findings as well as their relevance to treatment is presented.

The following two sections bring medical issues into context as it explores the relationship between body image, disease and deformity. The role of medical and surgical interventions are highlighted as well as the effect of weight loss and fitness enhancement programmes.

The psychological interventions discussed in section eight are founded on the relevant conceptual framework on which the book is based. Programmes for

prevention of body image problems in the education system are presented and evaluated.

In the last section conclusions are drawn and directions for theory, research and clinical practice are indicated. The authors advocate the development of standardized body image assessment modules in order to give unambiguous direction to different body assessment methods for specific purposes.

What impressed me most about this book is that the content of this book is contemporary and applicable. Lastly, I have to agree with the commentary by Christopher Fairburn on the cover of the book, that *this remarkable handbook is 'encyclopaedic' in scope.*

MARIANE C. VILJOEN, D.Phil., Senior Lecturer  
*School of Nursing*  
*Faculty of Health Sciences*  
*University of the Free State*  
*Bloemfontein,*  
*Republic of South Africa*