

## Book Reviews

*Editor's note* Unfortunately this is the last issue in which Professor Marlene Viljoen will be our book review editor. She has moved from the Faculty in Bloemfontain and taken an important new position elsewhere. With all of these new things, she will be unable to continue as our book review editor and do the job that she would want to do. Having been our first book review editor who is a nurse from a country in Africa, she plowed important new ground. Many thanks and good luck!

Ronald Richards

### Basics in Medical Education

ZUBAIR AMIN & KHOO HOON ENG

World Scientific Publishing Co. Pte. Ltd., Singapore (2003)

399 pp., ISBN 981-238-209-7

The authors have produced a useful introduction to the realm of medical education and in doing so, achieved their aim of delivering a medical education text for the general teacher. The book provides the reader with basic instruction in topics relevant to current medical education practices.

Each section of the book looks at one element of medical education and then explores it in the subsequent chapters. These sections include basic educational concepts, educational objectives, instructional methodologies, assessment and evaluation, the internet and research in medical education.

After assessing each of the sections the authors have chosen to focus on some areas at the expense of other important areas, and they acknowledge this within their introduction. However, I believe that at times the right balance is not met. If we look at the section on assessment there is no mention of the use of clinical assessments, particularly the multi-station framework of the OSCE (Objective Structured Clinical Exam). Little is made of the rapid increase in the use of EMQs (Extended Matching Questions) though these are described, albeit briefly, within the multiple choice chapter but not referred to as EMQs. As a subject, standard setting, is also absent from the assessment chapter, and this is an essential component of the assessment process.

Some areas of the book receive a high level of scrutiny, such as the area of educational objectives, which is an excellent exposition of the subject supported by very useful examples of good practice. This is in contrast to the chapters devoted to problem-based learning, which I believe gives relatively superficial consideration to the process, tries to cover a vast amount of information in a limited space and so is unable to do the topic full justice.

Despite the concerns in the balance of topics I believe the authors have produced a text that is a useful introductory tool for the general medical teacher with references to further material if the reader wishes to explore the topics at a deeper level.

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**Healing Conversations. What to Say When You Don't Know What to Say**

NANCE GUILMARTIN

Jossey-Bass, San Francisco (2002)

325 pp., ISBN 0-7879-6019-5

Self-help books are all around, and are often as sickly sweet as the film *Love, Actually*. I have to confess that I approached this book with scepticism. After all, it is not a conventional communication skills training manual and it is littered with chapter and subsection titles such as “tuning out of your head, tuning into your heart” and “Leo the cat, putting a four-footed angel to sleep”.

However, when dipped into and read in small doses, there are some useful descriptions of how to deal with difficult situations, from the problem of people falling out in the workplace to how to respond to an attempted suicide. The book is not written as a health professionals' textbook but is for anyone who might be unsure of what to say in an emotional circumstance. The suggestions are made using anecdotes, all of which are based on episodes in the author's life. The author, who is a broadcaster and community services advocate, writes well, but I would recommend not trying to read too much at one sitting. The right words are always found, and sometimes things are resolved a little too easily.

The main attraction of the book is that it presents communication issues from a different perspective than the usual professional-patient/client viewpoint. Some of the stories could be used as teaching materials to encourage students to reflect on everyday issues and to understand that people can resolve their problems without necessarily seeking professional help. It is rather long and repeats the same messages. The style sometimes grates. Many pages are written as dialogue, rather like a poor novel, but some readers may find that helpful. There is almost an evangelical feel to the words; I could imagine certain sections being delivered as sermons.

The section on giving and getting difficult feedback is interesting but too simple, given what we do as educators. So overall I have mixed feelings about this book, and I am not sure that once having skimmed through it, I would refer to it again...unless I needed inspiration for some case studies.

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