BOOK REVIEWS

Providing Information for Health - a workbook for primary care
Giles A.
ISBN 1-85775-916-8
Radcliffe Medical Press
This book aims to benefit all primary care health professionals by helping them to “facilitate the efficient and successful use” of the information systems currently available to them. The content of the book is based on the key topics outline in the Government paper Information for Health such as coding, electronic health records, clinical governance and evidence based practice.

The book is structured like a workbook where the reader can move between chapters/topics to suit their needs, and each chapter is accompanied by some thought provoking questions for the reader. Added to this, the book is supported by an interactive website which reflects the layout of the book and includes links to various online resources and documents and includes downloadable templates which should help you to develop your own information systems and your understanding of them.

I enjoyed this book’s refreshing approach to this topic and found it to be very user friendly for readers at all stages in information provision.

Alison Cowie, Information Analyst, Scotland, Marie Curie Cancer Care

Developing a Unified Patient Record: A practical guide
Thompson D. & Wright K.
ISBN 1-85775-939-7
Radcliff Medical Press
This book relates the authors’ successful journey in addressing the key issues of devising and implementing a Unified Patient Record (UPR) and provides a functional hands-on guide to this fashionable concept.

Chapter 1 – 5 sets the context for and provides detailed support of UPRs and elicits some important key points. There is a helpful resume of the theory that has driven changes in documentation practices, an emphasis on multi-professional record-keeping and the importance of operating a workable paper form as a pre-requisite to successful electronic records. There are however some generalisations regarding the process of assessment. For example the framework considers ‘one telling of the story’ to be ideal. This stance fails to take cognisance of the potential therapy of patients retelling their story, and the fact that patients tell different parts of their story to particular professionals at particular times. There is also an assumption that assessments can be documented quantifiably, quickly and easily. In some areas of care where holistic care is the primary goal, this is arguably not the case. Underpinning the need for a UPR – the authors argue that existing documentation is fragmented, of poor quality, difficult to read and time consuming. Is this always so?

The final three chapters outline principles of change management and provide helpful tools for those embarking on the process of implementing UPRs.

The key strengths of this book are that the content is grounded in experience and it is a helpful reality check regarding some benefits, pitfalls and challenges of UPRs. Many examples and a clear lay out also help in the reading of it. It does however lack objectivity at times, and fails to acknowledge the limited applications to certain health care settings. Despite this it serves as an essential read for background information and practical tips to health care professionals exploring the use of UPRs – with the proviso that each health care setting and health care team will require various modifications to that outlined in the text.

Marjory MacKay is Matron, Strathcarron Hospice, Denny

Miscarriage and Stillbirth – the changing response
Pierce B.
ISBN 1 85390 810 X
Veritas
Miscarriage and Stillbirth is described as ‘a resource for families, those in pastoral ministry and healthcare providers’. Perhaps because the author’s
own background is in healthcare chaplaincy, the content of the book is weighted more heavily towards those working in that area. However, there is also plenty of material which would be of interest to other healthcare professionals and bereaved families. Pierce reminds us, too, that many people do not fall neatly into one of these categories. His own family was touched by the death of a baby and he acknowledges that it was this personal experience which has led him to explore this area.

The content of the book falls broadly into three areas:

- the changing response to miscarriage and stillbirth – within society and within the church
- the nature of grief and how to support families
- the significance of ritual

There are two sections of helpful resource material: one with complete liturgies; the other with prayers, meditations and poems. These are gathered from different Christian traditions and from other faith traditions.

Pierce not only explores how practice has changed over the years – mainly for the better. He also reminds us that this is an ongoing process. Multidisciplinary teams are a key to improved practice. What is essential, however, above all else, is listening. Only if we listen to parents who have lost a baby will we learn how to be more sensitive and effective in our care.

Within healthcare chaplaincy reflective practice is encouraged. This well-written and informative book is exactly the kind of resource we need to help us reflect on the work we are doing.

Monica Stewart, assistant chaplain at Aberdeen Royal infirmary and Maternity Hospital.

Narrative-based Primary Care: a practical guide
John Launer (Ed)
ISBN 1 85775 539 1
Radcliffe Medical Press

This book is an introductory text about the use of narrative based practice within a primary care setting. Narrative-based practice has been developed from techniques used by family therapists over the last decade. It is described as a framework involving the use of practical communication skills in interactions between patients and healthcare professionals.

Part 1 focuses on clinical examples where the practitioner (mainly G.P’s) apply a narrative approach to help clarify the patients existing story and move towards a new and more informed story and problem dissolution. This is in stark contrast to the traditional medical model of problem solving. Various chapters explore the application of the approach to teamwork and clinical supervision.

Part 2 examines the effects of narrative based training for the practitioner and offers useful teaching exercises.

Part 3 focuses on the theory underpinning the approach. The challenges and limitations of the approach are reviewed.

The attention to narratives is an interesting concept and a difficult one to grasp. The author acknowledges that competency in this approach is dependent on practice and training. Anyone interested in developing communication skills would find this book valuable. It would be particularly useful for those involved in primary care and clinics where patient contact is time restricted.

Elaine McManus, Lecturer in Palliative Care at Strathcarron Hospice, Denny

Spiritual Caregiving as Secular Sacrament: A practical theology for professional caregivers
Anderson R S
ISBN 1-84310-746-5
Jessica Kingsley Publishers

I was intrigued by the title of this book but found the first few chapters heavy going. Writing as a practical theologian to professional care givers, Ray Anderson is concerned that people from different disciplines begin to recognise the importance of the spiritual dimensions in human caring. Indeed he views all effective care-giving as spiritual in nature where ‘spiritual’ describes the personal core of the human self, and he suggests that all humans are essentially spiritual beings, appropriate care-giving in a human encounter can be considered ‘sacramental’.

In his concern to integrate the theological and psychological insights as a basis for spiritual care giv-
ing, the author constructs a ‘pre-theoretical’ model to get behind the theories of human spirituality toward understanding the personhood. His question “How do we understand the core of the self... as we encounter this person as physical, spiritual and social being” leads him to present a practical theology of the self as a means of developing care-giving strategies.

These first chapters (The Spiritual Praxis of Practical Theology, The Integrative Gestalt of the Human Self, and The Ecological Nature of the Human Person) are abstract and theoretical – unlike the Praxis he recommends! – but his theory is developed from forty years of pastoral experience. However it gets better as it goes on, as the case studies are unpacked and his model is used to shed light on practice.

For those involved in pastoral care the emphasis on self (self-identity, self-worth and self-fulfilment) may seem at odds with the scriptural call to self-denial but we are reminded of the inherent value and potential of the human self as created in God’s image. Self-care is another issue for care-givers – maybe some Aha! Moments here- for which Anderson develops a model of spiritual fitness. Moral injuries to the self also come under the spotlight where forgiveness is premature until moral outrage has been affirmed. Throughout he recommends the religious community as a source of empowering love.

Finally, Anderson confronts spiritual care-givers with the need to face their own mortality before sharing in others’ significant losses or approaching death. We are left with the comforting thought that the art of care-giving is a matter of being attuned to the ‘spirit’ rather more than is the imposition of order upon ambiguous human situations.

This is a book that deserves to be read, and perhaps re-read, by those who deliver spiritual care and wish to reflect on what they do. The text is well set out and indexed, apart from the duplication of some quotations.

Sue Duncan, chaplain, Loanhead Hospital, Midlothian.

e-Pathways: computers and the patient’s journey through care.
de Luc K., Todd J. (Eds)
ISBN 1-85775903-6
Radcliffe Medical Press, 2003
Throughout the health service, care pathways are being developed to improve the quality and effectiveness of the care given to patients. This book aims to give the reader a practical guide on how information technology can be utilised to support the development, implementation and maintenance of electronic care pathways and consequently support high quality patient care.

The book examines the current use of care pathways and its associated limitations, and considers how a more systematic approach to the development of care pathways could be developed. This then leads to discussion around the potential of adopting information technology and systems thinking to aid the development and implementation of care pathways.

I found this book to be clear and logical and a good resource to those who wish to know more about, or develop further, patient care pathways.

Alison Cowie, Information Analyst, Scotland, Marie Curie Cancer Care.

Involving patients and the public: How to do it better
Chambers R., Drinkwater C., Boath E.
ISBN 1-85775-994-X
Radcliffe Medical Press
Patient and public involvement is firmly on the healthcare agenda. It is at the heart of government strategy for the developing NHS. In Scotland, NHS Quality Improvement Scotland is required and committed to have patient and public involvement in its development and audit work, and locally, clinical standards require that care be evidenced and often through audit. Add to that the healthcare culture of Clinical Governance and you can see why this book has been written.

Many people when they think of audit assume they need to develop a questionnaire. Not so, says this gem of a book. First of all you need to decide why you are doing audit: is it to satisfy a standard and show you have completed an audit, or do you genu-
inely want to know about your service and seek involvement and improvement?

This book explores in easy to read chapters the various methods of patient and public involvement. There is a useful section on questionnaires and interview surveys, how to develop them and their strengths and considerable weaknesses; a section on working in groups to gauge opinion and gain consensus; and a detailed section on ‘Doing it right, boring but necessary’ which explores sampling, validity, reliability, ethical approval, obtaining and storing data and the data protection act.

The chapter ‘choosing the right method for the right reasons’ outlines a five stage process that summarises the previous chapters into a clear process and offers four examples of pathways to user and public involvement, each with a sample pathway for either community involvement or patient and carer involvement. The four samples look at: improving information and communication, difficult decisions about treatment funding and resources, implementing clinical governance, and assessing and targeting needs within the limits of resources.

This is a comprehensive, easy to understand and informative book. It provides practical, honest and helpful information. It is a book that will not only help you think through how you will achieve the audit or patient and public involvement you seek, it will help you understand your motives, and think through what kind of quality you want in your audit. If you are serious about patient and public involvement and in really knowing what people think then this book is a must.

David Mitchell is lecturer in palliative care, and chairs the patient and carer experience group in the Marie Curie Hospice Glasgow.

Jessica Kingsley Publisher. London and New York

This book presents an interesting broad overview of pastoral care beginning with an exploration of the meaning of pastoral care in its widest sense considering the place of art, drama and language, moving to the development of pastoral care in different cultures and times and a historical review of the understanding of pastoral care. Looking at both the place of pastoral care and the resources available to deliver it the author considers different models and explores questions such as what makes it different from other forms of person centred care.

In discussing what he feels to be three important issues in pastoral care the author considers the place of counselling, liberation theology and spirituality in pastoral care. He emphasises the importance of looking at the whole person taking into account their cultural background and the continuing affect this may have upon them. Counselling may be considered as a particularly western development of pastoral care. If someone has a problem which is influenced by the conditions they live in of poverty or oppression then can they receive proper pastoral care if the conditions which hold them there are not also addressed? The understanding of spirituality may vary widely so that it may reflect a very personal model of pastoral care or be seen as involving a whole community.

By considering pastoral care in the context of a multicultural world the author asks us to celebrate the diversity which is found there and so to understand pastoral care in terms of ‘Every human person is in some respects (a) like all others (b) like some others (c) like no other’.

At a time when we are seeing great interest in the development of spiritual care in the healthcare setting this book challenges us to be aware of the diversity of tradition and development throughout the world and to reflect on our own practice as we work in a pluralist setting.

Gillian Munro, Head of Department of Spiritual Care, NHS Tayside

In Living Color
An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care and Counseling
Second Edition
Lartey, E.Y.
ISBN 1 84310 750 3