

A Good Read

GPs are bombarded with new publications on an array of interesting topics, and despite good intentions it can be hard to find the time to read a text book. I confess that had I not been posted *Evidence for Health, From Patient Choice to Global Policy* to review for the primary care section of the annual BMA Book Competition, I would not have thought to put a book on global health policy at the top of my reading list! However it proved to be a thoroughly worthwhile read.

The Author, Anne Andermann, Associate Professor in the Department of Family Medicine at McGill University, Montreal Canada, makes a compelling argument for better understanding of evidence based decision making amongst frontline health workers. She provides a comprehensive refresher on the concept of evidence based medicine and basic epidemiology and writes clearly. You could read it and easily imagine that someone in front of you was having an informal conversation about the topics covered in each chapter.

The seven chapters cover a swathe of important issues across twenty-first century health care from the clinician-patient interaction to global policy making. Though the international references and case studies may seem less relevant to a British reader, they acutely illustrate the issues at stake when making health care decisions and the gross inequalities in health across socioeconomic groups at global and national levels. She poses questions such as whether the billions of dollars poured into genetics and genomic projects have had a significant impact on population health to justify the cost compared to investing instead in clean water, sanitation and schools in developing countries. Andermann goes on to outline the difficult trade-offs between improving health overall versus supporting vulnerable groups, for example 80% of rare diseases are of genetic origin and it is thought that distinct rare diseases affect up to 8% of the world's population which equates to approximately half a billion people!

Individual-level decision making for health is also explored with three different scenarios, firstly that of an Eastern European weighing up his choices on being advised to stop smoking. Secondly, a North American woman with a strong family history of breast cancer contemplating a bilateral mastectomy and lastly a rural African woman unsure about vaccinating her children when her village elders view Western medicine with suspicion.

In the new NHS with GPs (allegedly) in the driving seat of health care commissioning, I would encourage all those involved in CCGs to read this and indeed any health professional who strives to deliver the most effective care and service possible to their patient and local population. As Andermann points out *“frontline health workers are essential to mobilising change. Not only are they well placed to bear witness to the injustice and unfairness in society which leads to poor health and health inequities, but they are also in a strong position to recommend the implementation of a continuum of strategies for improving health...”*

Reading this book has opened my eyes to the increasing importance of evidence based decision making. As a GP the choices of treatment for patients can feel overwhelming and evidence based medicine perceived as a subject for public health doctors and academics, but this publication provides vital information for all health professionals. I hope as many as possible read it.

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