



The Science of the Placebo

Toward an Interdisciplinary Research Agenda. Edited by Harry Guess, Arthur Kleinman, John Kusek and Linda Engel. Pp. xi + 332. R303. BMJ. 2002. ISBN 0-7279-1594-0.

The placebo response in clinical practice has always been something of a mystery. Its reality is well established but its mechanism of action is obscure. This volume examines the placebo from various standpoints and provides a holistic focus.

Perhaps the most useful and practical aspect of the book is its comprehensive consideration of ethical issues. The inclusion of placebo control groups in clinical trials has become more contentious recently with the advent of the Helsinki Declaration in 2000. Several chapters are given to analysing the dilemma of when placebos are permissible and when they are clearly inappropriate although the 'grey areas' still remain problematic. The alternative to the randomised placebo-controlled trial is the 'non-inferiority trial' and this relatively new concept is discussed in detail.

Other sections deal with the dynamics of placebo in terms of cultural settings, personality factors, social learning and Pavlovian conditioning. There are two unnecessarily detailed chapters on the neuro-endocrine mediators of placebo effects on immunity and on the role of endogenous and non-endogenous opioid pathways in placebo analgesia.

In short, this is an informative work that provides a multidisciplinary overview of the placebo phenomenon. It will be particularly helpful to those involved in the planning of clinical trials and with the work of ethics committees.

Ashley Robins

World Report on Violence and Health

WHO. Pp. ix + 346. R195. WHO. 2002. ISBN 9-789241-545617.

Violence, more than any other single factor, is the major cause of death among the 15 – 44-year-old population globally. It destabilises individuals and communities and leads to enormous suffering. For this reason, the first World Report on Violence and Health is a seminal contribution.

It comprehensively examines different types of violence in separate chapters. These include youth violence, child abuse and neglect, violence by intimate partners, abuse of the elderly, sexual violence, self-directed violence and collective violence.

An ecological framework is used as an explanatory model for different forms of violence on individual, interpersonal and broader societal levels. The framework contributes to a holistic and meaningful understanding of violence dynamics that is crucial for interventions. The report furthermore strongly

motivates for a public health approach that encourages preventive thinking as well as traditional reactive approaches.

The most challenging aspect of the report is perhaps the recommendations for systematic action because intersectoral, multi-pronged interventions are required. It argues for collaboration between governments, NGOs and communities regionally, nationally and globally.

The challenge is to operationalise suggestions. In this regard, the report on violence and the South African health sector's strategic framework (1999-2004) share many commonalities in terms of the approach to violence and prioritisation of prevention. Both draw extensively on preventive, interdisciplinary, intersectoral and participative interventions highlighted in the Alma Ata document (WHO, 1978). The shared vision in these documents provides a useful platform for operationalising specific interventions for this country.

This report is considered essential reading for policymakers, academics, community workers and all those involved in violence and trauma-related work.

Ronelle Carolissen

IN MEMORIAM

Anne Linder

Anne Marshall Linder died in Cape Town on 2 August 2002 after a long illness.

She was the daughter of Geoffrey Linder, a Professor of Chemical Pathology at UCT for many years. Anne qualified MB ChB in 1949. Her first marriage was to architect Sam Hart and her second was to Hugh Giles.

After graduating, Anne spent a short time in clinical medicine. After this she went to England, and worked in the pathology department of the main hospital in Liverpool. Papanicolaou had put his pap smears in the early detection of cell changes preceding cancer of the cervix on the map, and Linder studied this development in England. In 1960 she returned to South Africa and in 1961 joined Dr Fry at Karl Bremer Hospital.

Professor JN de Villiers started an Exfoliative Cytology Unit there, having written part of his CMOG thesis in London on the subject. At this time the local pathologists had no interest in the discipline and it was left to the gynaecologists to develop their own laboratories to deal with it. Dr Linder was the backbone of the Karl Bremer unit and it was due to her ability and hard work that a Genetic Unit was started within the