Book Reviews


Appraisal and revalidation are topics that even the most experienced doctor cannot ignore. This book seeks to provide a structure for teachers in the various health-related professions to be used to undertake and document their competence in their various educational activities. The chapters are constructively divided into recognised educational areas, each beginning with a short review of the topic. The authors choose to use the construct of the evidence cycle as the basis for producing documentation and then set out to demonstrate how this can be undertaken by using everyday examples. The exercise cases are commonly encountered and practical – the authors wisely emphasise the importance of choosing a simple task for an evidence cycle.

The format of the chapters is somewhat repetitive but this is balanced against the reality that the five stages of the cycle of evidence are firmly embedded into long-term memory by the end of the book. Teachers with little formal knowledge or experience of education and teaching should find the text constructive and practical. Those with more experience will find the book provides a useful summary. The book does provoke thought, and in the case of the reviewer motivated her to undertake an evidence cycle related to appraisals. This rather suggests that the text achieved its goal.

Reviewed by Dr Elizabeth S Nyholm, FRCGP, MFFP, GP Tutor, Castle Vale Health Centre, Birmingham, UK


This book sets out to help GPs with their personal development plans and the collection of information necessary for appraisal and revalidation. It provides numerous examples of subjects that could be studied, and sets out a template for the collection of evidence. This template could also be used by doctors in any specialty to produce a portfolio of their learning.

The first three chapters give a detailed account of personal development plans and how to demonstrate competence. This is useful as a reference but contains so much information it is easy to become overwhelmed.

Chapter 3 has an easily followed procedure for setting up a research project in general practice. However, the process involves a large input of time and the conclusion reached in the example, namely “you revise your plans as the scale of the work required is becoming out of all proportion” is a useful warning to any doctor considering such a project. There are many examples of worthwhile studies throughout the book.

The following seven chapters concentrate on individual topics in women’s health. Each contains a summary of the subject, amusing case studies and suggestions for learning plans. The case studies are not directly related to gathering evidence and at times seem to break up the flow of the text. The topic summaries are at a very basic level of knowledge, for example: “checking blood pressure before giving contraceptive containing oestrogen is essential”. It is unclear where this fits in with demonstrating competence. The information would be useful to medical and nursing students but I would expect doctors and specialist nurses to have this knowledge already.

Each chapter has a very useful reference section and suggested further reading, including websites. The chapter on the menopause is out of date with regard to hormone replacement therapy.

This book attempts to combine a textbook on women’s health with a practical guide to collecting information for appraisal and revalidation. The reader is in danger of getting lost between the two. It is a useful reference book to help doctors with appraisal and to guide them through the steps involved to collect evidence. However, it is too superficial to be a useful textbook on women’s health.

Reviewed by Dr Lesley Smart, MRCPGP, GP, Midlothian, UK

References
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4 Murray GJ, Nandhra H, Hynas N, Hunt N. Psychiatrists omit information from letters when they know patients will be sent copies. BMJ 2003; 326: 449.
5 Housden PI, Do patients want copies of their letters? bmj.com Rapid Responses 2004, 328: 733.