

Book Reviews

Under the Safety Net: The Health and Social Welfare of the Homeless in the United States

Philip W. Brickner, Linda Keen Scarer, Barbara A. Conanan et al., editors, W. W. Norton & Company, New York City, 1990, 439 pp., \$27.95

THE EDITORS AND MORE THAN 100 CONTRIBUTING authors present a compelling look at the health problems of the homeless and the programs established

to address these problems. The number of homeless persons in this nation is staggering, with almost 1 percent of the U.S. population being homeless for some time each year. The homeless population is tremendously diverse and ranges from impoverished, welfare-dependent families with small children to young minority single persons and elderly white single persons. Their health problems include substance and alcohol abuse, mental illness, and chronic and acute physical problems—all of which are intimately intertwined with the severe social deprivation of homelessness. The authors describe programs that are set in the context of a larger healthcare and

social welfare safety net that is tattered and ineffective.

Under the Safety Net is based on the rich, geographic, culturally, and clinically varied experience the authors have gained from working with homeless persons in the 19-city Robert Wood Johnson (RWJ) Health Care for the Homeless Projects (HCHPs). The book holds a wealth of diverse information, ranging from practical programmatic experience gained by RWJ HCHPs in numerous settings to in-depth clinical advice based on more than 30,000 clinical encounters. However, *Under the Safety Net* does more than provide technical information. Through the liberal

BOOK BRIEFS

Organizing, Designing, and Building Ambulatory Healthcare Facilities: A Practical Guidebook

Marshall Erdman & Associates, Madison, WI, 1991, 295 pp., free for healthcare executives and physicians (paperback)

This book is an expansion of a 1989 edition put out by this design and construction firm, incorporating some recent experiences administrators face in opening ambulatory healthcare and medical office buildings. Topics covered include competition, rural hospitals, marketing space to physicians, financing, programing, a project-cost model, site selection, and facility design.

Operation! A Handbook for Surgical Patients

Robin A. J. Youngson, Sterling Publishing, New York City, 1991, 160 pp., \$9.95 (paperback)

Written for patients in Great Britain who are on surgery waiting lists, *Operation!* details the hospital experi-

ence, from diagnosis to postoperative recovery. The author discusses four case histories in which each operation is clearly explained so the patient knows exactly what to expect—from anesthetic to pain relief. Youngson believes a successful operation and recovery depend on the patient's positive participation and offers advice on self-preparation such as mental attitude, physical fitness, and nutrition.

Guiding Autobiography Groups for Older Adults: Exploring the Fabric of Life

James E. Birren and Donna E. Deutchman, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1991, 146 pp., \$38 (hardcover), \$14.95 (paperback)

To help older adults come to terms with their lives and meet new demands and life changes with increased confidence and competence, many experts on aging recommend guided autobiography. The authors describe how to create and conduct guided autobiography groups. The chapters cover promoting creative thinking, facilitating group interaction, and mastering obsta-

cles in the group process. This book was written for gerontologists, psychologists, social workers, and other professionals who conduct programs for older people.

BOOKS RECEIVED

The Changing Context of Social-Health Care: Its Implications for Providers and Consumers, Helen Rehr and Gary Rosenberg, eds., Haworth Press, Binghamton, NY, 1991

God's Lost Children: The Shocking Story of America's Homeless Kids, Sr. Mary Rose McGeedy, Covenant House, New York City, 1991

Health Care Sales: New Strategies for Improving Quality, Client Relations, and Revenue, Ken E. Mack and Philip A. Newbold, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 1991

Helpmates: Support in Times of Critical Illness, Harry A. Cole, Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 1991

Coming in the
Next Issue of
**Health
Progress**

use of frank, honest, and engaging vignettes of homeless people and their problems, the authors provide a palpable, "gut-level" description of homeless persons' experiences and describe problems they see daily among the homeless. In a sense, the authors allow the homeless to tell their own stories through the case scenarios, and this is what makes the book so effective.

Under the Safety Net is divided into three sections. The first describes the problems and successes of establishing the HCHPs across the United States. The authors show "that more than good intentions, careful planning, appropriate staffing, and adequate funding are required for the successful delivery of services to the homeless. Political acumen, eagerness to work with others in the community, and determination have proved equally important attributes for success."

The chapters in the second section focus on several specific health problems (alcohol and substance abuse, AIDS, tuberculosis, hypertension, and mental illness) and provide overviews of the health problems of several subgroups among the homeless (runaway youth, women, children in families, and the elderly). The judicious selection of issues within each area and the illustrative use of case scenarios help the reader gain a reasonable understanding of the complex nature of the issues despite their brief treatment. Seldom are pat solutions offered. As in real life, these solutions seldom exist.

Under the Safety Net demonstrates to readers that providers can have a significant clinical effect on the homeless despite enormous obstacles. Positive outcomes require dedicated, multidisciplinary efforts on the part of the healthcare team and a reasonable level of compliance on the part of the homeless patient. The process of care that is followed in treating the homeless is radically different from traditional medical care: The healthcare provider often continues to follow the patient even after losing control of the medical care because of a

lack of client cooperation or trust. The healthcare team must thus be willing to work with the patient and use all resources at hand to engage the patient in appropriate medical care. The case scenarios give readers a better sense of these issues.

The third section in *Under the Safety Net* addresses the aspects of patient management beyond clinical care such as case management, outreach, income, and housing. These chapters reinforce the recurring theme of the entire book: Healthcare for homeless persons must be client centered and address the needs of the whole person, not focusing only on the medical needs. The healthcare team must become competent in entitlement advocacy, offering social support and a variety of other services in addition to coordinating medical visits and medications. Otherwise, the medical care will benefit the homeless person only temporarily. Moreover, with such limited effect, program personnel can quickly become frustrated and burnt out. Several chapters in this last section provide practical administrative tips on how to organize staff, prevent burnout, develop public-private partnerships, perform quality assurance, and sustain a program.

Under the Safety Net is a practical, "hands-on" manual for any practitioner, community and healthcare group, hospital, or healthcare organization contemplating work with the homeless. The authors give readers an appreciation for the difficult struggles homeless persons and their service providers face. The book should be required reading for all emergency room personnel, hospital administrators, and any other healthcare providers who treat homeless persons. The authors do not give the provider instant solutions to clinical or administrative problems; however, they provide significant technical and practical information that can be applied to creative problem solving on the local level.

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HEALING THE ENVIRONMENT

In this special section, Rev. Thomas Berry, CP, discusses the role of the healing professions in an earth that has become dysfunctional, and Rev. William J. Wood, SJ, reflects on how we can learn to think and live in a way that is healing and regenerative. Another article highlights the efforts of Catholic providers to develop environmentally sound energy and resource management practices. And James Studnicki sets out a framework for hospitals to conduct a medical waste audit.

CATHOLIC IDENTITY

How do healthcare facilities retain their Catholic identity when they undertake mergers or joint ventures with non-Catholic hospitals? Rev. Tom Vowell, CPPS, provides a canon law perspective.

CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

Sr. Mary Jean Ryan, FSM, and Gayle Capozzalo give a progress report on the St. Louis-based SSM Health Care System's implementation of continuous quality improvement processes.
