

## Books & Electronic Media

### Child public health

Authors: Mitch Blair, Sarah Stewart-Brown, Tony Waterston & Rachel Crowther  
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It was a pleasure to review this excellent introductory textbook on child public health written jointly by respected paediatricians and public health professionals. The presentation is clear and authoritative, with key points helpfully placed in text boxes for emphasis. It is an ambitious work that very successfully covers an extremely large body of theory and practice. This is one of the two main strengths of the book — bringing together in one text various disparate elements and showing how they contribute to an understanding of child health. The other area in which it excels is in presenting thoughtful summaries of milestones in the history of child public health in the United Kingdom, the determinants of health in children, and lessons learned in tackling child health problems.

The coverage of the book is impressive, ranging from family and community perspectives and approaches through to advocacy and national policy. It thus presents an excellent overview for those coming from medical, nursing or social science backgrounds but who are training in child public health. The breadth of coverage necessarily means that the approach is not an evidence-based one, in which the link between recommendations and primary research is carefully documented. Rather, the expert judgements of the authors are drawn upon to select the key points and references that are presented. This is not a problem in an introductory text.

About a quarter of the book is taken up by background theory, concepts and methods in relevant public health disciplines such as epidemiology and health promotion, and public health practice. Risk and causality and methods, such as needs assessment, are also

explained. This is done clearly and competently, although more effort could perhaps have been made to present this material from a child health perspective. All these issues have been well covered elsewhere, of course, but spread over a number of disparate textbooks. Presenting them together in this way should be an attractive alternative for those looking for a single text to cover this field.

The scenarios that are used to illustrate how child public health can be practised in real life are both novel and helpful. However, examples illustrating the application of lessons learned in clinical child health to the public health sphere would have been welcomed. This section could also usefully have been extended to include examples of the contribution to child health of other professionals not employed by health services.

For a first edition, this book has made an excellent attempt to cover the essential elements of the topic. What is missing? Really very little and it seems churlish to be critical of the coverage. More mention could, however, have been made of global polio eradication (one of the most important child public health programmes globally), the achievements of the global Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI), neonatal problems (a major cause of global burden of disease among children) and the health of young people/adolescents. Also, there is also no discussion of how to tackle the hugely important public health problem of nicotine addiction/smoking, which often finds its origins in adolescence.

This book will be found extremely helpful by health professionals who are training in child public health or who wish to develop their understanding or and skills in this field. These include community paediatricians, public health specialists, general practitioners, and community or public health nurses. It may well become a standard text on this topic for these professionals. However, more could be done to present the perspective of non-health professionals in education and social services departments. The book deserves to be read widely

and may well have an important impact in training a new generation of health professionals involved in child public health. If it achieves the success it deserves, I hope that in future editions it will shift the book's primary focus from the United Kingdom since many of the issues it covers are universal. ■

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