

BOOK REVIEWS

McGaghie, W.C., Miller, G.E., Sajid, A.W. and Telder, T.V. (1978) **Competency-based Curriculum Development in Medical Education: An Introduction**, Public Health Papers No. 68, World Health Organization, 91 pp. Sw. fr. 9.

Medical education has become of increasing interest to the medical profession and no longer a closely guarded domain of medical schools. Medical educationists and the profession have expressed concern over the discrepancies that existed between the medical curriculum and the functional requirements of medical practice and, in the past two decades, the undergraduate curriculum has been critically reviewed by all medical schools and many of them have made significant changes. In addition, the new schools that have been established have radically departed from the traditional curriculum and adopted a curriculum in which a high degree of integration has been brought about in both the vertical and horizontal dimensions.

This publication from the World Health Organization edited by eminent medical educationists has made a critical review of the various curricula models and expressed the need for medical schools to continually evaluate teaching. The authors have carefully reviewed and identified some of the inadequacies of a subject-centred curriculum and expressed the view that such a curriculum prepares health workers according to disciplinary rather than community expectation. A truly integrated undergraduate curriculum, on the other hand despite its favourable feature, is often difficult to implement effectively. Apart from the teachers' earlier resistance to changes, faculties which are departmentally structured find difficulty in integration across disciplines. The authors have, however, highlighted its advantages. In support of the Competency-Based Curriculum the authors have identified its advantages and emphasised the need for new skills on the part of teaching staff. The authors have presented an indepth study

on curriculum development based on competency and have carefully analysed the element of competence required of doctors and emphasised that a good physician in one setting may be totally incompetent in another depending on the health needs of the population. Detailed analyses on physician activities required to identify the level of competence are carefully explained to support the main theme of the thesis. Arising from this, they have suggested possible curriculum content required in the undergraduate curriculum. The remainder of the book deals with the programme organization in general terms with reference to the general training of doctors and recommended methods of identifying various curricula modules and instructional units.

Examinations are usually equated with assessments in the training programme and authors have critically reviewed this and emphasised the need for frequent assessments of learning rather than having examinations as methods of certifying that the students have learned an acceptable amount of what has been taught.

The last chapter deals with details of preparation of teachers, students and institutions to accept new ideas in curriculum and educational concepts.

I recommend this monogram published by the World Health Organization as a useful document for all medical educationists and am confident that it will stimulate a new approach in curriculum development. The authors have clearly outlined the value of a competency-based curriculum and methods of developing such a curriculum. A central component of the competency-based system is the need for students to accept responsibility for learning and for the teachers to continually examine its efficiency and effectiveness, its costs and its benefits.

K. Somasundaram