

Recent Publications

Drug distribution in Nigeria

Very little research on drug usage has been undertaken in Africa. Yet, too often, the problems are apparent to all. The solutions are more elusive. Where do people turn to get medical advice and drug supplies in the absence of doctors and nurses? Is the advice sound and do they get the right medicines? Can the drugs be trusted when they are available? These are some of the questions recently addressed within an epidemiologically-based research project undertaken in Nigeria with the collaboration of the Federal Ministry of Health.

The proceedings of a workshop in which the project was presented and discussed have now been published. They provide a frank and transparent account of the consequences for patients wherever there are frailties in the infrastructure needed for the effective control of medicines, and the conclusions drawn have broad relevance throughout the developing world. They point to the devastating scale on which substandard and fake drugs can enter the distribution chain when the perpetrators face negligible risk of detection, and constitute a veritable charter for pharmacists. In many developing countries the profession remains virtually unrepresented. Yet, without them, the skills and experience needed to assure the quality and effective distribution of medicines, and to assure the standard of service required at the end point of sale is simply non-existent.

Reference: *Drug distribution and fake drugs in Nigeria — international workshop*. Ed. D. Pole. Federal Ministry of Health, Nigeria, Lagos, 1989. ISBN 3-923937 75 X.

Epidemiology in microcosm

For most health workers epidemiological studies are the preserve of the sophisticated specialist. It is undoubtedly true that the determinants of biological phenomena are rarely simple and that the difficulties of establishing causal relationships between events, as in the case of reactions to administered drugs, can be daunting. None the less, it is also true, as the preface to this book emphasizes, that epidemiological techniques can be used effectively within a highly localized context to investigate prevailing patterns of disease, to identify environmental and behavioural factors that influence the health of the community and to provide objective assessments of the impact of various interventions.

The authors aim to show how simple, but reliable techniques can be used to define and analyse health problems at community level on a routine basis. They explain how quantitative information can be used to target interventions selectively to those who will benefit most and how epidemiological indicators can be used to monitor their impact. This is a book that can be read with advantage, not only by those responsible for planning health services but also by those who, in providing them, are concerned to develop a rational attitude toward the delivery of health care.

Reference: *Manual of epidemiology for district health management*. Eds. Vaughan, J.P., Morrow, R.H. World Health Organization, Geneva, 1989. ISBN 92 4 154404 X.