Book review

Workshop on coronary heart disease

Trends in Coronary Heart Disease Mortality. The influence of medical care. Edited by Millicent W Higgins and Russell V Luepker. (pp 302: £32.00.) Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988. ISBN 0-19-505297-8.

The Committee of Public Accounts, in their report on coronary heart disease, have accorded a verdict of "deplorable" to Britain's attempts to reduce mortality from coronary heart disease over the past two decades.¹ The King's Fund consensus statement, after their forum on "Blood cholesterol measurement in the prevention of coronary heart disease", recommends a national food and health strategy to reduce the general concentration of blood cholesterol in the population.² Britain has suddenly become publicly conscious that it leads the world league table for deaths from coronary heart disease. It is only because Britain is so far behind the United States in confronting the issues relating to coronary heart disease, that this publication—based on a workshop convened by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute in December 1986—is still important reading. A similar workshop in the United States in 1978 on the fall in coronary heart disease mortality first focused American and world attention on the need to evaluate the factors responsible for the decline in deaths from coronary heart disease seen in the United States from 1968. By 1985 there had been a decline of 60%.

This book has 30 short papers relating to time trends and regional patterns of coronary heart disease and medical care, determinants of mortality from coronary heart disease, the influence of medical care on risk factors, management of acute myocardial infarction in and out of hospital, and the influence of medical care on chronic coronary disease. The standard of presentation is high although it is frustrating to realise that there are no references beyond 1986. Surely the editors of this type of book should not only allow but insist on each paper carrying an additional annotated bibliography of the major new papers on the subject appearing between the meeting and the reading of proofs. Many of the reports making up the chapters have appeared in print since the 1986

meeting, but the coming together of all these presentations in a well edited format makes for a structured approach to the overall problem.

Britain is seeing a small but regular decline in deaths from coronary heart disease since about 1976. There is currently a heightened concern about the allocation of resources to prevention (£10 million) and treatment (£500 million) and an urgent need to evaluate the impact on the morbidity and mortality of coronary heart disease of various preventive and therapeutic (medical and surgical) measures. This book provides a very useful primer for all those embarking on the new phase on coronary heart disease in Britain. By American standards it may be dated, but it reaches Britain before we have established a comprehensive national system for monitoring risk factors and before we have evaluated the true need for the various surgical procedures currently available. At a time when the health care system is changing in unpredictable ways, we might do well to learn from the endeavours of others. Epidemiological surveillance needs to be adapted to track rapidly evolving care for patients with coronary heart disease. The new therapeutic methods require new and efficient clinical trials to justify their use. Diagnostic methods need to be evaluated because their costs and implications are considerable. While death rates from coronary heart disease in Britain will probably continue to decline slowly, we remain high in the world league table and we need to know how to evaluate the factors responsible for this fall in order to increase the rate by appropriate measures. This book should be read and considered by all those participating in the current coronary heart disease campaigns.

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References

- 1 Committee of Public Accounts. *Twenty sixth report: coronary heart disease*. London: HMSO, 1989.
- 2 King's Fund Forum Consensus statement. *Blood cholesterol measurement in the prevention of coronary heart disease*. London: King's Fund Centre, 1989.