BOOK REVIEWS

Fitness for Work: The Medical Aspects

It is now over 25 years since the first edition of *Fitness for Work* was published and this, its fifth edition, follows the time-honoured format of chapters co-written by a topic specialist and an occupational physician. The editors are eminent in the field of occupational physician themselves and by pulling together over 60 other authors from the UK, Europe, North America and Asia they have produced an authoritative text.

New chapters on sickness absence management and cancer survivorship have been added as well as guidance on fitness for work following surgery and after critical illness. All other chapters have been updated. Recent developments such as the ‘fit note’, Black Report and changes to the default retirement age have all also been included, making the volume generally bang up to date.

One area I do think needs further updating is the section in the first chapter that discusses the WHO classifications of disability. Although it rightly mentions that the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health has replaced the International Classification of Impairment, Disabilities and Handicaps, it then discusses the latter rather than the former.

Over 20 clinical chapters all the major systems and conditions are covered. Some conditions may be found in unexpected places—obesity, for example, occurs in the chapter on gastrointestinal disorders rather than with diabetes in the endocrine chapter. But overall the format is easy to read, easy to stop and start and clear and logical in its layout.

In my view the book is essential for all who practice occupational health, not just occupational physicians who are its main intended audience. I think it would also, in parts or as a whole, be of value to human resources, the legal profession and health and safety practitioners who would gain from the chapters on sickness absence prevention and management, ethics and health screening. It is keenly priced and should be on everyone’s bookshelf.

Rating

★★★★ (Essential)

Nerys Williams

The Stress Less Workbook: Simple Strategies to Relieve Pressure, Manage Commitments and Minimise Conflicts

The author is a professor of psychology and research professor of psychiatry at the University of Carolina and has written a number of books on psychology, aimed at a lay audience. He also has a number of published articles, mainly in behavioural journals.

This is very much a self-help manual, aimed at a lay audience and would not take more than a couple of hours to read from cover to cover. It is structured into three sections addressing stress and its causes, techniques for reducing stress, and practical applications of those techniques at home and at work. The book covers issues including communication, assertiveness, time management, relationships, and stress at work.
The book is well laid out and easy to read with bullet-point lists, tables, and self-assessment tests. It uses vignettes as examples of stress before providing suggested techniques for managing it. However, this is not a referenced scientific text, and much of the advice is common sense or the author’s opinion and certainly not a summary of current academic stress research. Overall, the approach is based on cognitive behavioural therapy.

As a lay self-help manual, it offers some useful advice. However, it is quite superficial in its approach. It addresses dealing with a difficult boss at work, ie, but does not detail causes of work stress such as demands, control, and support. Overall, the language, the vignettes, and the techniques are very much US centric in their approach and presentation and may not resonate well with a UK audience.

In summary, this is a short stress self-help manual, aimed at an American lay audience. It is not recommended for occupational health professionals, and the presentation may not be suitable for a UK audience.

Rating
★★✩✩ (Reference only)

Steven Nimmo

doi:10.1093/occmed/kqt069

Ethics Guidance for Occupational Health Practice

Faculty of Occupational Medicine, Royal College of Physicians. Published by Faculty of Occupational Medicine, Royal College of Physicians, London, 2012. ISBN: 978 0 9574927 0 7. Price: £35.00. 72 pp.

It is 6 years since the last publication of this guidance, and much has changed both in society and in medical practice. The use of social media has mushroomed and with it, new ethical challenges. One significant change in this new edition is its target audience—no longer is the guidance for Faculty members and limited to occupational health physicians; this guidance aims to be relevant for a wider group of individuals, i.e. those in wider occupational health practice.

The authors of the guidance cover the spectrum of established and newly qualified occupational health physicians, nurses, safety professionals and ethicists, bringing a level of authority to its content. It is good to see that a wide-ranging stakeholder consultation took place and so the views of businesses, trade unions and other health care professionals have also been considered. It is a UK-focussed text and therefore may be of more limited value to a wider North American and European audience.

Over six chapters, the authors cover the main areas of ethical dilemmas for the practising occupational health advisor—including governance, the handling of information, workplace health and wellbeing, occupational health research and fitness for work assessment. Each chapter is subdivided, making it easy to read and to dip in and out of. I thought the format, style and layout were excellent and would really help the reader assimilate the issues. The inclusion of short vignettes beautifully illustrates the complexities of issues under discussion and provides a framework for readers to work through.

If I have one criticism, it is that issues around ethics and social media only get three paragraphs on one page. I think the dangers for users, particularly naive users, of this new environment require more consideration, but perhaps that is for the next edition.

So is anything missed out? I don’t think so. Does it meet the needs of the new target audience? Maybe, but I think it remains primarily guidance produced for doctors by their professional body although other health professionals and interested others (safety and human resources colleagues, for example) will find it of great value. For UK occupational health physicians, I think it is essential, and for other occupational health practitioners, it is an invaluable reference.

Rating
★★★★ (Essential)

Nerys Williams