HOW TO MEASURE AND EVALUATE COMMUNITY HEALTH

**A self-teaching manual for
rural health workers**

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**A SELF-TEACHING MANUAL FOR
RURAL HEALTH WORKERS**

JANE McCUSKER, MD, DrPH

**Illustrated by
SISTER JEAN LORENZ, SCMM**

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I have tried to incorporate most of the suggestions I have received from these people and from the many students who tested and evaluated the units. The responsibility for any remaining mistakes, poorly written or unclear passages is mine however.

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Jane McCusker

PREFACE

This book was originally conceived during a two-year period, 1973–74, which I spent at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in the Division of Community Medicine of the Faculty of Medicine. Rural community health work is appropriately being emphasized in Tanzania, in the training both of doctors and of other cadres of health professionals: medical assistants and rural medical aides. This training aims to prepare these students for work in a country-wide system of rural health centres, each providing clinical and community health services for a catchment population of approximately 50,000. The medical assistants who run these rural health centres are supervised by the District Medical Officer to whom they refer their more seriously ill patients. These medical assistants, in turn, are responsible for supervising the work of rural medical aides in satellite dispensaries as well as running clinics at the health centre, and mobile clinics which visit outlying rural areas.

This book attempts to cover those skills and concepts, necessary to the work of the medical assistants, which may loosely be termed “epidemiological”. These include making a community diagnosis of major health problems in the population, selecting priorities, setting goals, organizing and evaluating the results of services. To do this work requires: a certain facility with basic statistics and the ability to prepare and interpret tables and graphs; a knowledge of the goals of primary, secondary and tertiary preventive services; application of some basic demographic principles to the catchment population; and some approaches to evaluating the effectiveness and quality of health services.

The ten units which comprise this book have been organized around those educational objectives thought necessary for the medical assistant to carry out his community health work effectively. Some or all of the units may also be appropriate for other cadres of health workers. The material in each unit is presented in a self-paced learning format which allows students to proceed at their own rate, with frequent opportunities to test their understanding of the unit material. I believe that this format is particularly appropriate for situations in which there are large class sizes and considerable variability in student experience and ability.

An earlier version of the book published by the African Medical and Research Foundation was aimed primarily at an East African audience. In this revision I have attempted to make the material more widely applicable by removing references to specifically East African examples and by carefully reviewing the entire book for accuracy, consistency and clarity of the material presented. I hope that the book will now be useful to a variety of students in many different countries and I would welcome comments and suggestions on it both from students and teachers.

J. McC.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Advice for students and instructors

To the student

This book is probably different from others that you have used. The method that it uses is *self-learning*: you learn the material *on your own* and more importantly *at your own pace*. You are likely to get most benefit from studying this book if you read and follow the instructions given below carefully.

The book is divided into 10 units. Each unit will take most students between 1 and 2 hours to work through. It is better to work through each unit *without interruptions* so be sure you have enough time before you start.

The first part of each unit is the *Introduction* which tells you something about the material to be covered in the unit. The second part of each unit is the *Objectives* which tell you what you should be able to do after working through the unit. Read through these when you start the unit and read them again very carefully when you have finished the unit. You should feel confident that you can now do everything listed in the Objectives: if you can't, you should read through the unit again. If part of the unit is still not clear to you, talk to an instructor.

After the Objectives, the rest of each unit is presented in sections, with several *Practice Questions* during and at the end of each section. These Practice Questions are to help you find out whether you understand and are learning the material. It is very important for you to attempt all of these questions without looking back in the unit. When and *only when* the instructions tell you to check your answer should you look up the correct answer to each question given at the end of the unit: if you get any answers wrong, you should review the preceding section carefully. If the section is still unclear you should talk to an instructor before continuing with the unit. When you reach the end of the unit *and* feel confident that you have mastered it, you should turn to the *Post-test* for that unit at the back of the book. If you have truly mastered the unit you should be able to do all the Post-test questions correctly, *without looking back at the unit*.

To the instructor

This book is not intended to substitute for regular teaching activities such as lectures, seminars, field work, projects, etc. If it is used correctly, however, we believe that it will help you to make more efficient use of the teaching time you have available.

The 10 units are intended to be used in the order in which they appear, each building on information learned in previous units. It is not advisable, therefore, to omit any units except, perhaps, Unit 7, which involves somewhat more difficult concepts and may not be considered

essential for a basic course in community health.

It is recommended that you assign each unit as homework for your class. Try to be available in case any of the students encounters problems working through the unit. Then plan a class session based on the unit, showing students how the ideas in the unit can be used in their work, using local data, etc. Many of the units are excellent starting points for practical work and projects and several even contain suggestions for projects which can be carried out in health centres and dispensaries.

Definitions of all the technical terms and concepts are given at the end of the book.

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