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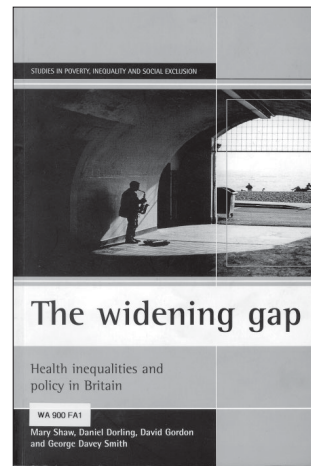
A dictum that medical writers have always been brought up to follow is that if a thing is worth saying, it is worth saying simply. It is likewise generally true that it is often the person who knows a significant amount about a specific subject, who can express complex issues and concepts in intelligible, crystal-clear and concise terms. This was the maxim of Lord Denning, Master of Rolls, and it has served well many a lawyer.

This elegant booklet is intended for practising doctors and it follows these basic tenets to the letter. The book is simply written, very legible and replete with updated and easily assimilable information in its 12 short chapters which many a doctor will find useful.

As is to be expected from a law book, the significant cases are quoted and referenced, and more importantly – though unfortunately not commonly in other law books – precised into a few sentences. The book is totally biased towards English legal practice and addresses such basic medico-legal subjects as consent, causation, compensation, litigation, legal procedure, disclosure, coroners and complaints.

Given that nowadays few medical schools teach any legal medicine to their undergraduates, and only pay lip service to the specialty in postgraduate education, this book would serve as a handy educational vademecum for all fresh, and seasoned, medical graduates, acting as a baseline on which to build other medico-legal expertise that will be of indubitable assistance in the ever-increasing forays of the legal profession into the medical profession.

**A. BUSUTTIL**



The Policy Press, 1999  
ISBN 1 86134 142 3

This well-presented analysis of the growth of health inequalities in Britain during the 1980s and early 1990s should be read by all those responsible for developing both health and fiscal policy. In particular, Gordon Brown might find it salutary to re-read his own words extracted from a report on *Scotland: The Real Divide* written jointly with Robin Cook in 1983. *The Widening Gap* also provides a wealth of material for all those with an interest in this challenging health problem, including those responsible for introducing students to the topic.

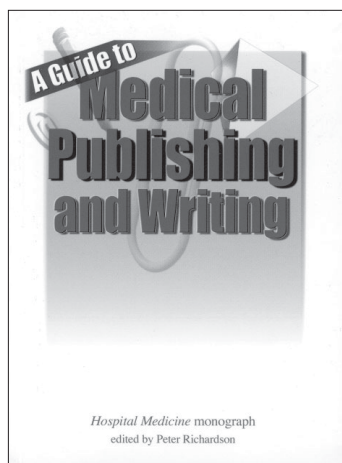
The core theme is a novel comparison of the respective health of the million British citizens living in the parliamentary constituencies with the highest and lowest premature mortality rates for the period 1991–5. Not surprisingly, nine of the 15 constituencies with the ‘worst’ health are in the west of Scotland, five are in the north of England and one is in inner London. None of the 13 ‘best’ health constituencies are in Scotland or the north of England.

An introduction by Peter Townsend summarises much of the existing data on health inequalities, while the main text draws on a range of published material covering: *The Health Gap*; *Explaining the Gap*; *The Widening Gap*; and *Narrowing the Gap*. The analysis provides compelling evidence of a direct correlation between poverty and poor health, showing a parallel increase in the income gap during the 1980s due primarily to a growing divide between families with no wage earner and double-income families. The concluding review conveys the authors’ deep sense of disappointment that wealth redistribution is not yet accepted as a crucial policy for reducing health inequalities.

**H. ZEALLEY**

#### Erratum

It has been brought to our attention that in the last issue of *The Journal* there was a typographical error in the review of Dr John Forfar’s book *From Omaha to the Scheldt: The Story of 47 Royal Marine Comandno*. Lines 18 and 19 of the review should have read: ‘such ideals brought the best out of the combatants’. We apologise for any misunderstanding caused.



Quay Books – Mark Allen Publishing Ltd, 2002  
ISBN 1 85642 222 4

The ability to write, and to write well, is acknowledged from the time of signing on as a medical undergraduate to be an integral asset of any medical career, which, as this develops and matures, may have to be expanded into print and publications. In the current climate, when in lieu of unfettered freedom of expression, syntax and spelling have to some extent fallen by the wayside in modern educational systems, medical students do not come well equipped for the task of writing, yet from their earliest clinical contact they are taught and expected to write down the histories (in a coherent and concise manner) that they have taken from patients. They are also instructed in how to collect, search databases and assess critically the literature that they read.

After graduation and channelling into chosen specialties, whatever these may be, the writing up of case-reports and reviews will progress and mature into the publication of research papers, compilation of theses, and ultimately, perhaps, the critical pronouncement on the work of others as peer reviewers and as editors of journals. Some doctors may even proceed to become full-time medical journalists – the latter being a career that many a medical practitioner appears to be embarking on nowadays, given the vast increase in popular interest in healthcare topics. The current IT revolution has enlarged this vista yet further into such new horizons as the production of web pages and CD-ROMS for patients and colleagues and publishing in the Internet.

The art of writing is to a chosen few an innate trait, but to the majority it is a skill that had to be acquired, gradually and carefully cultivated, burnished and honed over the years. For this to take place, a certain modicum of trial and error, training and critical review by others who have trodden the same path previously are essential. It is this that this book does so well. There is a chapter on writing your curriculum vitae, on writing a critical letter to a journal and on being a journal editor.

This genuinely pocket-size book contains 15 chapters on the subject of writing for doctors; the *British Journal of Hospital Medicine* commissioned this book, and all the chapters have previously been published in this journal. The contributing authors are all in-the-know on the subject they discuss, and individually they have a lengthy, wide-ranging experience to their credit. Each chapter is plainly written, succinct, elegantly laid out (and complemented by a series of strategically placed tables and bullet points) and easily assailable.

This publication is a joint venture with the Royal Society of Medicine, an organisation that has always striven to foster good practice and through its own press published excellent monographs and reviews.

The scope of this book is to inform those about to embark on medical writing or critical appraisal in its various forms, laying down for them a job description, a mission statement and a full specification for the writing task in hand. The emphasis is on *how* to actually address the matter in hand and set down one's own thoughts competently and carefully in writing. This is achieved from the high ground of competence and experience, given that the authors have been handpicked for exactly such qualities. This book does not forget the editors of journals, the writers of editorials and the reviewers of articles and sets each a 'mission statement' ensuring their best guarantee of success.

This book should find a place in an accessible pocket of any medical publisher, author, reviewer or editor.

**A. BUSUTTIL**