

DECISION-MAKING IN GENERAL PRACTICE

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Preface

This book contains the collected papers and ensuing discussions at a conference entitled *Decision-making in General Practice* held at Holme Pierrepont, Nottingham, England in December 1983.

The stimulation for this workshop lay in a research project at the Department of Community Health at the University of Nottingham. This project, funded by the Medical Research Council, was aimed at producing computer-based decision support systems for general practitioners. As part of the ground-work, we undertook a review of the literature relating to decision-making in general practice, and were surprised how little there was. There were many papers on the topic of medical decision-making in general, but few of the reported studies had tackled the problems of general practice, and there was no central core of journals or books that we could turn to to locate further information. Furthermore, the material that we did find tended to be spread over a number of years, and the same names kept cropping up over and over again.

It was obvious to us that while there were other people working in the same area of research, there were only limited opportunities for communication between them. A forum at which all could discuss this topic of common interest seemed to be an important requirement for the progression of research. We therefore made some tentative enquiries of all the people whose names we had come across, and much to our surprise the great majority of them agreed to come to the workshop.

This book contains the contributions made to the workshop by the invited speakers, and also attempts to summarise the discussion of the papers. A wide range of disciplines and points of view were represented. There were medical practitioners, social scientists, psychologists, computer scientists, medical educationalists and general practitioners. The delegates to the workshop came from many countries, including the Netherlands, Norway, the USA, Canada, South Africa and the UK.

Because of this wide range of backgrounds, the reader may detect disagreements between various authors represented in this book and in the summaries of the

discussion. We do not intend to try and resolve any of these disagreements. We feel that to do so would be to disguise the current state of the art in this area of research and enquiry. On the contrary, we hope that the juxtaposition of these differing points of view will provide further food for thought and will stimulate more research in this area.

M.G.S.

J.B.

A.L.R.

Acknowledgements

The workshop owes a great deal of its success to Alison Langham, who, despite the scattering of the Nottingham research group to various corners of the country, managed to hold everything together whilst doing all the many tasks that administration of a project of this kind requires, in particular the irksome ones of chasing contributors, producing material for precirculation, and keeping the other members of the research team in order.

We also thank Joyce Gilbert, Sheila Kelsey and Judy Rose for the care, tolerance and patience required to turn the conference proceedings into a book. Any mistakes in this book are the fault of the editors and not the secretaries.

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