topics are generally well balanced so that those on different sides of controversial issues will all find their views represented—for example, the effects of alcohol consumption on vascular disease. The range of subjects covered is impressive including, as it does, several that are often overlooked such as peripheral arterial disease and clotting factors. Relatively infrequent metabolic disorders that nevertheless need to be considered are identified, including hyperuricaemia and homocystinuria. The rapidly growing interest in antioxidants is also recognised. One obvious omission is of aspirin in the prevention of vascular disease; if there is another edition, a section dealing with this would complement the very practical reviews of anti-hypertensive therapy and lipid-lowering regimes. Experts and non-experts alike will find the book informative, very useful for teaching purposes and of great practical management value.

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Measurement of patients' satisfaction with their care.
Edited by Ray Fitzpatrick and Anthony Hopkins. Royal College of Physicians, London, 1993. 123pp. £9.00.

One of the most significant recent developments in the National Health Service has been the extent to which patients are increasingly referred to as consumers. Managers and other health care professionals are being encouraged to develop a much more responsive approach to their customers. As a result, there has been an explosion of both interest and activity in seeking the views of patients about their experiences of the health care system. This phenomenon begs at least two questions. Have the multitude of surveys done any good? Could they do any better? This little book, which is the product of a workshop sponsored by the College, primarily addresses the second of these two questions.

Fitzpatrick sets the scene with a useful account of the scope and measurement of patient satisfaction. He argues that one important reason for taking measures of patient satisfaction seriously is that they are related to other significant indicators of health outcomes. At the same time he acknowledges that there are some serious practical problems in actually measuring patient satisfaction. One is that 'it is seldom defined and almost never theoretically examined'. Another is that most patients are reluctant to express criticism and so positive satisfaction responses are the norm. A third issue is that many socio-demographic factors influence statements of satisfaction, and a failure to recognise this can produce quite misleading guidance for policy and practice. Finally, there is a host of issues about the reliability and validity of instruments which purport to measure patient satisfaction.

The substance of the book is to be found in six accounts of particular research projects. Thompson describes an approach to identifying issues about the quality of inpatient care which are important to patients themselves. He argues that what is required are instruments which ask specific questions relating to actual experiences in ways that capture the nuances of variations in care in different settings and contexts. Next, Gritzner describes the development of the CASPE patient satisfaction system which aims to provide a management tool for the continuous monitoring of the views of hospital patients. In contrast, both Leavey and Wilson and Baker explain how they have developed instruments to obtain the views of patients about different aspects of general practice.

One of the problems with many studies of patient satisfaction is that they tend to focus almost exclusively on the 'hotel' and process aspects of care. There are relatively few studies of satisfaction with clinical care. A welcome addition to this collection, therefore, is Fitzpatrick and Hopkins' study which sets out to investigate the value of a neurological referral for headache from the viewpoint of the patient.

The final methodological contribution explores the value of critical incident technique as a way of capturing patient perceptions. This is followed by two general discussions about differences in doctors' and patients' perspectives which might influence perceptions of satisfaction.

Like many edited collections of this kind, Measurement of patients' satisfaction with their care is a mixed bag. It contains a wealth of useful information, but it is not clear what the book is trying to do and at whom it is aimed. A more valuable product might have been a sharper and more critical distillation of the contributions as part of a more systematic overview of studies of patient satisfaction. That may have been too ambitious an objective for this particular book. Nevertheless, what Measurement of patients' satisfaction with their care does offer is the considerable complexity associated with obtaining meaningful views from patients about their care. It also provides a good starting point for those charged with conducting such surveys for the first time.

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Access to health care for people from black ethnic minorities. Edited by Anthony Hopkins and Veena Bahl. Royal College of Physicians, London, 1993. 226pp. £12.00.

The scope of this collection is wider than the title suggests. The authors present evidence that there is inequitable access to health care and discuss the reasons for this. The ways in which the needs of ethnic minority groups can be met within purchasing, management and primary care structures are described, with specific chapters on the needs of mothers and