

Plantation Medicine

D R O'Holohan

It was with a sense of excitement that I started to review this textbook by Dr O'Holohan, primarily because there have been few textbooks published on the Malaysian health care system, but more especially so as this was a text on the plantation sector which is a major economic sector of the country. Dr O'Holohan's wide experience with the plantation sector makes him the right authority to author this text. This is clearly reflected throughout the text as he shares his personal viewpoints on several issues to enhance the value of the book.

The book is presented in four sections, each covering a different aspect of plantation medicine. The first deals with the legal responsibilities of management and starts off with the origins and history of Malaysian plantation medicine. This is relevant to all practitioners within the country's health care system, as it is plantation medicine that laid the roots to the current modern health care system we have. The numerous laws that affect the health, welfare and quality of life in the Malaysian plantation industry are detailed out over three chapters with emphasis in the act for workers' minimum standard of housing and amenities. The Occupational Safety and Health Act 1994, which is the most recent, is also covered, thus making this text very current. Dr O'Holohan's excellent discussion on the perspective of this act based on his vast experience should be read by all practitioners and persons who are likely to use this act directly or indirectly. This section concludes with a focus on the estate medical team, and the estate hospitals and clinics. The author details out the roles of the Resident Medical Officer, Visiting Medical Officers, and the Estate Hospital Assistant. He describes issues dealing with occupational hygiene, sanitation, safety and responsibilities of estate owners and resident managers regarding these. Details given on the siting, construction, equipment, drugs and medicines with floor plans relevant to estate hospitals and clinics are valuable information that are not easily obtained today and that too in one document.

Section 2 looks into the practice of plantation

medicine. Guidelines on drug purchasing and medical record keeping on plantations are given. This section also focuses on policies on this, the proper records of drug and equipment purchases, dispensing and stock; as well as details on various registers and indexing of patient records, which form a vital part of plantation medicine records. These serve useful purposes not only for annual reports and documentation but also for working with the management to justify purchases to be made.

The chapter on 'Housing the Estate community' is valuable to Visiting Medical Officers and community health workers alike. Again Dr O'Holohan's experience is evident as he takes the reader through vital and minute details. Even detailed specifications on housing, the nursery, and the community hall are given. Sanitation and the environment is covered in detail too which environmental health workers will find useful. Vector control is given importance with descriptions on the breeding and feeding habits, and behaviour pattern of mosquitoes, not neglecting a host of various other vectors and pests.

Water supplies, the sampling of water and its treatment is given in detail as a separate chapter. The last two chapters of this section are important to anyone interested in agrochemical and pesticide usage in the plantation sector, as well as on occupational safety and health. It must be mentioned that this is an important section on preventing and reducing accidents in plantations, which would interest those involved in injury prevention.

The third section is a valuable section on infections and communicable diseases encountered in the plantation sector. However, his descriptions are relevant to any practitioner interested in the epidemiology and control of these diseases which includes very current problems such as AIDS. The final chapter in this section is devoted to first aid and emergencies, a chapter that any primary care practitioner will find useful.

The final section would interest executives in the

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plantation sector as it concerns maintaining their health. The issue of palm oil and its role in human nutrition is addressed in this section. Several documented issues that are not easily accessible to busy practitioners regarding the role of palm oil in nutrition are brought together in this section. The appendices that follow are relevant to the plantation sector providing useful addresses of relevant local and international agencies. Also given are examples of forms useful in record keeping.

This textbook is valuable not only to those directly involved with providing care and service in the plantation sector but also to all other public health personnel and medical practitioners. Dr O'Holohan is to be congratulated and thanked for this excellent document that is not only timely but useful as we strengthen and further develop our health care delivery system for the benefit of all Malaysians.

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