

health care encounters, are not covered by the pool. The fact that the well-publicized RAND Health Insurance Experiment found that the use of health care — whether needed or not — was influenced by out-of-pocket costs raises another question: Would Congress enact any publicly funded program that did not provide universal coverage for services that promote health and prevent costly hospital care?

The book contains a detailed discussion of the rationale for this plan and indicates that Luft is cognizant of certain concerns that his plan raises. He envisions, for example, “an income-based subsidy program that reduces the premium and out-of-pocket costs for all low-income people,” and that some preventive care might be covered by the pool. He also discusses how current health programs could fit into SecureChoice, using a vignette to illustrate the choices that people could make, including remaining in an employer’s health plan. At times, Luft’s detailed description of the options available in SecureChoice has the unintended effect of making the proposal seem excessively complex.

Now is the time to evaluate SecureChoice and other health care proposals. Swift action is crucial if policymakers are to take advantage of this defining moment to enact health care reforms.

Marian E. Gornick

3704 N. Charles St.
Baltimore, MD 21218
mgornick@aol.com

**HYPING HEALTH RISKS:
ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS
IN DAILY LIFE AND THE SCIENCE
OF EPIDEMIOLOGY**

By Geoffrey C. Kabat. 250 pp. New York, Columbia University Press, 2008. \$27.95. ISBN 978-0-231-14148-2.

HOW HEALTH RISKS ARE INVESTIGATED, PERCEIVED, and discussed is hardly objective and dispassionate. Rather, a variety of cultural, political, personal, and other factors influence which potential hazards are studied, how they are studied, and how the findings are interpreted, disseminated, and applied. In *Hyping Health Risks*, author Geoffrey Kabat compellingly illustrates this point and provides a sense of the dynamics involved.

The core of the book, and its greatest strength, is a set of four case studies, each centered on epidemiologic investigations of a putative health risk. These case studies are focused, respectively, on environmental causes of breast cancer, health effects of electromagnetic fields, risks associated with residential radon, and harm from environmental tobacco smoke (“passive smoking”). In these case studies, Kabat, an epidemiologist at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York, provides social, political, journalistic, and other contexts, as well as epidemiologic research. For example, he describes how social and political factors led to a federal law that requires research related to possible environmental contributors to breast cancer on Long Island, New York. He shows how a questionable series of articles in *The New Yorker* stimulated research into the health effects of electromagnetic fields. He also discusses how the wish to eliminate smoking seems to have engendered exaggeration of the health effects of environmental tobacco smoke.

Kabat is at his best in the chapters in which he presents the case studies. The text is highly informative without overwhelming readers with details, the reasoning appears rigorous and is easy to follow, extensive documentation is provided, the writing is concise and readable, key points are listed at the ends of chapters, and the narrative flows well. Kabat is not, however, an entirely disinterested narrator — he notes having coauthored a study that showed no association between exposure to electromagnetic fields and breast cancer, and he discusses the hostile reception of a paper he coauthored that did not show a higher rate of lung cancer among nonsmoking spouses of smokers.

To help readers understand the information and reasoning in the case studies, Kabat precedes them with a chapter in which he summarizes the basics of epidemiology, including types of study design, criteria for judging whether an association appears causal, and absolute versus relative risk. This rundown can be a helpful review for readers who are already acquainted with epidemiology, but it might be challenging for those who are new to the field.

Probably the least successful chapter is the first one, “Introduction: Toward a Sociology of Health Hazards in Daily Life.” Kabat’s intention in the chapter is to portray the context in which “certain

health risks have been selected and distorted,” and he touches on such topics as risk perception, risk reporting in the popular media, and social and psychological factors that influence the conduct of science. Less developed and less polished than those that follow, this chapter seems almost to be an afterthought. Perhaps it should have been briefer and more tightly written, like the chapter in which Kabat presents his conclusions, or perhaps it should have been developed further. Additions could well include a more thorough overview of research on risk perception and an examination of the ways in which medical journals contribute to or limit the hyping of health risks.

Despite its minor limitations, *Hyping Health Risks* can interest and aid a variety of readers. For students in the health sciences, health journalists, and policymakers, the case studies provide information on their respective topics and also serve as lucid demonstrations of epidemiologic reasoning. For sociologists, historians of science, and media scholars, the case studies can be starting points for further exploration. And for educated general readers, the book can engage and enlighten regarding the complex context in which known and suspected health risks are identified, explored, and acted on.

Barbara Gastel, M.D., M.P.H.

Texas A&M University
College Station, TX 77843
bgastel@cvm.tamu.edu

TYPE 2 DIABETES MELLITUS: AN EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACH TO PRACTICAL MANAGEMENT

(Contemporary Endocrinology.) Edited by Mark N. Feinglos and M. Angelyn Bethel. 474 pp., illustrated. Totowa, NJ, Humana Press, 2008. \$139. ISBN 978-1-58829-794-5.

CHANGES IN LIFESTYLE THAT PROMOTE obesity and physical inactivity have led to a global increase in the prevalence of type 2 diabetes and its coexisting diseases among people of all ages. Given the numerous articles that have been published about diabetes, a synthesis of the evidence supporting current practices is the cornerstone of a successful approach to this public health problem. Written by an expert team of collabora-

tors and edited by Mark Feinglos and M. Angelyn Bethel, this book contains information on most topics related to type 2 diabetes, and the best evidence is integrated into a practical understanding of the disease and its treatment.

There is discussion of epidemiologic information about the increase in type 2 diabetes, not only in adults but also in children, adolescents, and the elderly. The pathogenesis of type 2 diabetes and its complications, as well as the metabolic mechanisms that are involved in insulin resistance, are masterfully presented. Emphasis is placed on the role that an increase of plasma-free fatty acid plays in the impairment of insulin sensitivity and insulin secretion.

There are also practical recommendations for nutrition therapy and exercise training. Although the health benefits of exercise and the effectiveness of nutrition in the treatment of diabetes are well documented, physicians are often poorly trained in these topics. The authors of this book introduce readers to the basic elements of realistic strategies for helping patients to initiate good nutrition and physical activity.

Despite the existence of numerous effective pharmacologic treatments for diabetes and its coexisting diseases, the frequent failure to achieve recommended treatment goals is a major challenge. The suboptimal systems for the delivery of diabetes care, the failure of some clinicians to adopt a treat-to-target approach, patients' lack of adherence to pharmacologic and nonpharmacologic therapies, and the issue of the cost of care are among the many barriers to optimal outcomes in diabetes care. The authors of this book assert that the system of traditional health care is not appropriate, emphasizing the scarcity of multidisciplinary teams that can provide comprehensive services and the frequently passive attitudes of physicians who ignore the point that the outcome is in the hands of the patient.

In summary, this book, written in an easily read format, must be placed among the required readings for those who seek a comprehensive understanding of the nature and treatment of type 2 diabetes.

Fernando Guerrero-Romero, M.D., Ph.D.

Mexican Social Security Institute
34067 Durango, Mexico
guerrero_romero@hotmail.com