

**Book Review****MEDICAL RISKS 1991 COMPEND OF MORTALITY AND MORBIDITY**

**A Compilation of Reference Articles Published in the *Journal of Insurance Medicine* of the American Academy of Insurance Medicine;**

*Richard B Singer, MD, Editor, Michael W Kita, MD, Associate Editor, John R Avery, Managing Editor*  
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A "compend" is a compendium, or collection of worthwhile information in the words of Richard Singer, MD. The intent was twofold: to produce a smaller scale version of the earlier *Medical Risks* books (1976 and 1990) with less delay than the previous large-scale projects have necessitated, and to place in the reader's hands articles never before collected or published in a single accessible volume. Commissioned in 1990 by AAIM it includes articles and abstracts published from 1986 through 1991.

The book contains 50 articles and abstracts on various morbidity and mortality subjects in a convenient single-source desktop reference volume. Most of the contents were previously published in the *Journal of Insurance Medicine*, there is new information on a few subjects (such as AIDS) and some articles are updated or revised.

Dr. Singer's devotion to the study of morbidity and mortality is legendary, and this work is yet another pillar supporting his well deserved reputation. This is not to belittle the efforts of Dr. Kita and John Avery in the production of the book. All three have contributed greatly to produce a work which brings morbidity and mortality analysis of articles previously published in the general medical literature nearer to the present time.

Part I of the book makes available in one place most of the recent articles about mortality and morbidity; this is useful for easy reference and for teaching. In addition to the text used in the AAIM course on mortality methodology there are papers on the selection, preparation and classification of abstracts, plus papers on informatics and statistics as they relate to mortality and morbidity.

Part II is approximately two thirds of the book and it contains the abstracts and articles about impairments as they relate to specific diseases, systems and epidemiology. There is a predominance of articles on the cardiovascular system, five on neoplasms, only one on the nervous system, and none on the liver or psychiatry. To a large extent this spread of subjects reflects suitable survival studies in the general medical literature and responds to the preponderance of heart disease among the problems facing medical directors evaluating risks from applicants for insurance. Therefore to have abstracts of articles up to 1991 available is a major contribution for the scientific evaluation of medical risks in any area where knowledge of morbidity and mortality is required.

It does not make sense to criticize the selection of abstracts and articles selected as the editors print all the articles and abstracts published. But this raises the question: is the coverage of the subject balanced and complete? The answers have to be no on both counts, but I must hasten to add through no fault of the editors, in fact despite their best efforts. The primary explanation is that the insurance medical community does not produce many articles and abstracts on its subject. It is not a "publish or perish" branch of medicine, mortality methodology is an intimidating subject and staff reductions in this cost conscious industry leave medical directors with ever less time to spend on volunteer tasks.

Dr. Singer, Dr. Kita and others have spent much time to increase medical director involvement in the study of mortality and morbidity. They have achieved some success as evidenced by the growing number of abstracts in *JIM*, but there is still a way to go to reach complete coverage.

Another aspect is: can a book of this type be adequately up to date? Certainly the articles on methodology have great value irrespective of time, and many of the abstracts retain their relevance for many years. As medical management and therapeutic approaches change rapidly for many diseases it is difficult to keep current with the latest information. With the attention required to maintain accuracy and quality in publishing material of this type the editors deserve credit for achieving timely publication.

Again the demands of doing work of this caliber while doing a full time job is not easy, and as so much is voluntary work perhaps time has to be stretched a bit. Although it is appropriate that the book is published at this time it may be the last publication of abstracts in book form. To make abstracts available on-line from a data bank may become the accepted way in the future – at least that method would help to improve timeliness, although it will still be necessary to persuade medical directors to produce abstracts on a timely basis.

Every medical director who has worked for an insurance company for more than a year or two should be fully aware of all that is in Part I. Hardly anyone will get to know everything in Part II in similar detail but all involved with the evaluation of medical risks need to know what is there for reference.

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