

Integrating telemedicine

Introduction to telemedicine. 2nd ed. Richard Wootton, John Craig, Victor Patterson, editors. London: Royal Society of Medicine Press, 2006 (xii + 206 pp, \$53.80). ISBN 1 85315 677 9.

TELEMEDICINE IS A HEALTH SERVICE intervention involving the remote communication of information for clinical care. Now in its second edition, this revised text meets a growing need for a straightforward overview of telemedicine. Rather than presenting telemedicine as the application of a specific technology, the authors are explicit about the health service dimension, the types of services, and the building blocks required — indeed most useful for an audience of health care workers considering telemedicine.

The structure of the first edition has been maintained. Each chapter comes from well known practitioners of the discipline, and the editors have done an excellent job of linking all the material within the text. Telemedicine setups for a range of clinical settings are well illustrated.

The need for a practical problem-driven approach to implementing telemedicine is a common thread. In this respect, the book is balanced in its assessment of telemedicine. In keeping with the initial chapters (with detailed steps for designing a service and the barriers to implementation), readers would have



been greatly assisted by a list of evaluation questions for each stage of implementation and the key questions for developing a mature, sustainable service.

As the book itself acknowledges, the patchy diffusion of telemedicine is not well understood. Perhaps one area that could have been explored further is the sociotechnical dimension of information and communications interventions pertaining to the social and organisational issues which determine success. This is no criticism of the book but rather the discipline itself, which is still not mature enough to provide evidence about which particular models of telemedicine work in specific settings and why.

Introduction to telemedicine does, however, do what it sets out to do. It is pragmatic and even-handed, and the reader comes away with an appreciation of the realities of integrating telemedicine with routine care.

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