

BOOK REVIEWS

NUCLEUS - MEDICINE

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NUCLEUS comprises GENERAL SCIENCE, 'a concept building "core"', and a number of specialized courses of which MEDICINE is one. The former can be used in parallel with, or followed by one of the specialized courses.

MEDICINE is intended for students with 'some' knowledge of English who need to follow authentic oral and written discourse in the field, for which they require specialized language. The main objective expressed in the introduction to the course is, 'to develop in the student a competence in using English receptively and actively to enable him to extract information from written and oral texts, and from visual forms of presentation, and to develop the student's ability to follow continuous argument.'

The course consists of the student's book, a cassette of material for listening comprehension, and the teacher's notes which include guidelines on methodology, the aims of each unit, language items and functions, explanations of particularly difficult points in the subject matter as well as answers to all the exercises.

The student's book contains a total of fifteen units, of which

three are revision and one a consolidation unit. The material deals with medical concepts and their related functions. Some of the subject areas covered are: anatomy, physiology, biochemistry and histology. The layout is attractive with good illustrations and clear instructions. The units, which are graded in terms of difficulty, are divided into presentation, development, reading and listening; this amounts to approximately 3 hours of class time per unit, and implies a total of about 45 hours. The progression of conceptual and linguistic difficulty can be appreciated in the comparison of the patterns found in the following units:

Unit 1

- a) The liver is shaped like a triangle.
- b) The heart is shaped like a cone.
- c) The kidneys are bean-shaped organs.

Unit 6

- a) They begin the study of physiology when they enter the second year.
- b) They study microbiology at the same time as bacteriology.
- c) Surgery is studied from the beginning of the third year until the end of the fourth year.

Presentation

In each case, visual presentation of information is emphasised in the form of tables, diagrams, graphs, etc., which are appropriate to the subject and familiar to the student. The student is obliged to interpret the information in order to complete the variety of written exercises which follow. Occasionally, the student is asked to give an oral interpretation.

Development

In this section, patterns and concepts are transferred to

new contexts and the practice is extended from the sentence level to short texts by means of completion, fill-in, question/answer and other exercises. Our Medical English classes were mixed groups of medical students, doctors, bacteriologists, biologists and dentists; our policy being that anyone with a basic knowledge of the language who needed medical English and seemed suitably motivated should be accepted. According to our entrance tests, the students' English ranged from intermediate to advanced, but the majority of students were classified as low intermediate.

The students were able to manipulate the language in order to produce correct oral and written responses in the first two sections but responded rather reluctantly to teacher cues to transfer structures to new situations.

Reading

Although the texts in this section get progressively longer and more complex, it was felt that they did not train the student adequately to cope with authentic material in specialized medical books and articles from medical journals as they are passages from elementary medical text books saturated with facts. Because of this, the follow-up exercises which included a wide variety - true/false, multiple choice, completion, matching, labeling, rearranging paragraphs, summarizing, etc., were very easy for him. This section was complemented with full-length articles and reports from medical journals to which were added appropriate exercises to develop reading strategies as well as ideas for follow-up activities.

Listening

The recordings are clear and the pace is good. The exercises become progressively longer and more difficult, and are followed by a number of different types of useful exercises. However, it is felt that even the longest text is too short and concise for more than very elementary training towards aural comprehension of authentic talks or lectures on medicine.

These particular listening passages might have been

better exploited for practice in note-taking. Although the authors do not specify note-taking in their objectives, our students felt that it would undoubtedly be a useful component.

The Teacher's Notes provide comprehensive guidelines on the handling of material with suggestions for expansion or transfer to related areas. The teacher, whose knowledge of the subject is likely to be limited to lay terms, need not worry as all the answers to the exercises are clear.

Used simultaneously with instruction in the native language of the subjects dealt with in MEDICINE, the book might be successful in reinforcing the student's knowledge of the subject areas, as well as giving him the corresponding English equivalents; as in fact, the book closely resembles a medical textbook in English. However, when used with advanced students of medicine who have graduated from the basic areas of the course, or with qualified doctors, MEDICINE tends eventually to produce boredom as students proceed from one familiar area to another, and it does not appear to meet the student's current needs in the language. With such students we would suggest selective use of units which cover language items the group needs practice in, or whose content matter is appropriate for transfer to a particular student interest, and supplement the course with authentic material of a more interesting nature, such as case histories, research papers, new developments in the field and so on according to the preference of the group.

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