

J. Kerr, R. Weitkunat, M. Moretti, eds.  
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## ABC of behavior change: a guide to successful disease prevention and health promotion

WHO's *World Health Report 2002* has yet again identified the fundamental importance of behaviors as causes of much of the world's burden of disease. According to the report, the ten leading preventable risks to global health include unsafe sex, smoking, abusive alcohol consumption, low fruit and vegetable intake, and physical inactivity. Clearly, the issue is not whether behavior change is crucial to population health, but how it can be achieved. Plus things get even more complicated given Geoffrey Rose's assertions about the causes of cases vs. the causes of incidence apply to health-related behaviors, too – and that thus, policy and environmental approaches are becoming increasingly important, over and beyond individual-level efforts.

Against this background, Jacqueline Kerr, Rolf Weitkunat, and Manuel Moretti have brought together an impressive group of nearly 40 scholars from several disciplines (particularly psychology, sociology, public health, and economics) and regions (Europe, USA, Australia, and New Zealand) to contribute to this *ABC of behavior change*. Their explicit aim is to help preventive medicine, health promotion, and behavior change practitioners to better design and evaluate behavior change interventions. To this end, the book presents, in four sections, the backgrounds to health promotion, disease prevention, and intervention (The scope of behavior change), intra- and interpersonal factors (Personal factors), external and environmental determinants (External factors), and multiple ways to change both kinds of factors (Creating behavior change, which comprises 10 of the overall 24 chapters).

The Foreword is by Rafael Bengoa, then director of WHO's Department of Management of Non-communicable Diseases, and meanwhile of its Department of Health System Policies and Operations. He backs the book's broad approach by pinpointing the unfavorable dominance of reactive, downstream responses to the shifting patterns of disease in many coun-

tries. Among other things, he advocates new political and legal environments (e.g. related to the control of the tobacco industry), given major external barriers such as "industrial 'misbehavior'". After the background chapters, the reader deals with personality, cognitions, habits, stages of change, and motivation, socio-economic, physical, psychosocial, political, and cultural environments, and finally a range of interventions from learning habits and skills to environmental and social strategies.

The volume includes a vademecum in the form of a detachable leaflet listing a multitude of questions proposed to ask oneself if faced professionally with health behavior change. (It also indicates the chapters in which to look up the answers.) This is an innovative medium, the readers' utilization of which will be interesting to find out. A definitely pleasant feature is some professional cartoons accompanying some chapters; e.g., it was the first time I found a graphic illustration of the upstream/downstream-metaphor (p. 4).

The chapters vary somewhat in the number of references, from about three pages to nil, so not always can one expect an extensive review of key literature. (I personally didn't mind, since e.g. the "nil"-case of Tim Barnett's essay on Political and Legal Environments after all includes instructive insights on lobbying and change movements from an actual New Zealand member of parliament!) Maybe the most critical aspect of the book is that overall there seems to be a slight bent to conceal participatory planning processes. That is, one learns lots about interventions such as motivating personal change, social marketing, and creating supportive environments, but not that much about political participation of citizens and citizenries. Besides the existing comments on this issue (e.g. by Brian Oldenburg and Nicola Burton), a separate chapter may have given extra emphasis to the experience that potentials for action are greatest where professional-scientific, policy,

and public perspectives meet. Also, it could have contributed to developing and establishing a (social) psychology of such participation.

All told, this *ABC* gives a broad overview of key issues to consider in both research and action targeting health behavior

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change, and should constitute a useful textbook for both professionals and students in this field.

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