

## BOOK REVIEWS

The reviewers have been asked to rate these books in terms of four items: readability, how up to date they are, accuracy and reliability, and value for money, using simple four point scales. From their opinions we have derived an overall "star" rating: \* = poor, \*\* = reasonable, \*\*\* = good, \*\*\*\* = excellent.

### Final FRCA: Multiple Choice Questions.

By M D Brunner, P N Robinson, H Williams. (Pp 302; £16.99 paperback.) Butterworth Heinemann, 2000. ISBN 0-7506-4214-9. \*\*\*\*

The book title is self explanatory and is targeted at anaesthetists working towards the final fellowship. It is guaranteed to be a popular book for candidates to practise their examination technique and to guide their revision.

There is a very brief introduction with some common sense advice on how to tackle the MCQ examination and then the book goes straight into the questions. These are set out as five individual papers with 90 questions in each to mimic the true paper. The questions are well selected and cover many of the traditional topics. I liked the layout with the answers opposite the questions reducing the time wasted in turning pages to check the answers. There is, however, a great temptation to peep that must be continually resisted. There are a few esoteric questions to teach you not to guess and some of the answers include advice to the reader to learn more about particular favourite examination topics.

At the end of the book is a useful index where the reader can find all related questions to a particular subject. As a bonus in the final example paper, there is a mysterious 91st question hinting at the meaning of life. I was tempted to tell you the answer here but you should read the book first!

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### Normal and Pathological Development of the Human Brain and Spinal Cord.

By Maria Damska and Krystyna E Wisniewski. (Pp 192; £45 paperback.) John Libbey & Co Ltd, 1999. ISBN: 0-86196-591-4. \*\*

The authors have both spent many years studying the histological changes in the brain and spinal cord through gestation and early extrauterine life. Their main contribution is a wealth of illustrations of light and electron microscopical findings. It is a pity that the cresyl violet and other coloured stains have not been presented to the reader. All the pictures are in black and white. To the non-histologist, they seem rather similar from one page to the next. No arrows help the uninitiated with identification of specific items. For those who are familiar with the cell types described, developmental changes can be followed in a logical sequence. With at least 600 references and illustrations on virtually every page, the text occupies a relatively small proportion of the book. Some of the written material is difficult to follow. The style is jerky, almost staccato, in places but reads smoothly in

others. There are two parts to the book. The first deals with normal development and is followed by relevant references. In the second part, abnormal development is considered and liberally referenced. Throughout, the emphasis is on static findings rather than on the dynamic nature of development. There is very little reference to recent advances in knowledge of gene directed maturation of the central nervous system. Most of the publications cited refer to work done in the 1970s and 1980s, though there are a few later references. It is difficult to know for whom the book is targeted.

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### An Aid to Radiology for the MRCP.

By Kausik K Ray, Robert E J Ryder, Richard M Wellings. (Pp 348; £22.50 paperback.) Blackwell Science, 2000. ISBN 0-623-04912-X. \*\*\*

The "Ryder aids" to the MRCP have become essential reading for intending candidates and this new addition to the stable will no doubt prove equally successful. However I must admit to reservations about a book whose aim is to help candidates through an examination. One hopes for a loftier purpose in a medical textbook, and I have further reservations about the opening sentence: "The essence of medicine lies in the diagnosis and treatment of various conditions". Having said that, the book succeeds admirably in its aims. It is set out in a question and answer format based around specimen x rays. Sometimes the tenor of the question gives clues as to the radiological diagnosis but this is probably inevitable. The answers are sensible and concise and the radiological abnormalities are nicely illustrated on the x rays, which are also reproduced in the answer section. A short discussion of the relevant medical condition accompanies each answer. The reproduction of the contrast x rays, computed tomograms, and magnetic resonance images is generally good, although less successful for the plain films and in particular for some of the chest x rays the reproduction is poor; I was hard pressed to spot the calcific foci on p134.

Generally the breadth of cover is good, although sometimes tending to the obscure, for example, Werner's syndrome, at the expense of the more common, for example, no chest x ray of left heart failure or collapse of an upper lobe. There are a number of irritating errors associated with a first edition: a mislabelled x ray, two questions posed but not answered, an inappropriate plural, and a sentence repeated. With these provisos, this book is to be strongly recommended, although I would suggest that there is more to medicine, and to passing the membership, than just making a correct diagnosis.

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### Non-epileptic Seizures. 2nd Ed. Edited by John R Gates and A James Rowan.

(Pp 323; £70 hardback.) Butterworth Heinemann, 2000. ISBN 0-7506-7026-6. \*\*\*

The editors of this book were successful in recruiting authors of three main disciplines—neurology, neuropsychology, and psychiatry—to cover such a difficult diagnostic and management problem.

The book is divided into four parts and each ends with a helpful summary. The first part deals with the neurological aspects and differential diagnosis of non-epileptic seizures in both adults and children. Various chapters detail the relevant aspects in the historical features that suggest psychogenic seizures. The clinician is reminded not to miss unusual epileptic events with bizarre manifestations like frontal lobe seizures. The chapter on parasomnias is particularly helpful, detailing phenomena that can be confused with epilepsy. The only criticism I have to this part was the repetition of diagnostic lists provided.

The second part, covering the use of neuropsychological testing to differentiate neurological from non-neurological disorders, is explained with some helpful medico-legal examples. Neuropsychological functioning and quality of life variables are all covered for both the epileptic patients and those with non-epileptic seizures.

The third part is dedicated to the paediatric patient and covers cognitive, psychological functioning, and treatment of children with non-epileptic seizures. The differences between the adult and the paediatric patients are highlighted and the reader is also reminded that the non-epileptic attack in children may originate with the parent as a form of Munchausen syndrome by proxy. While the variety of psychotherapeutic approaches detailed may not be easy to follow by the non-psychologist and psychiatrist, advice on family and child education and mind-body connection are emphasised and made simple to read.

The fourth part deals with the psychiatric aspects of patients with non-epileptic seizures and concludes with a chapter on treatment strategies.

This book would prove helpful to all those managing epilepsy and of particular help to neurologists, neuropsychiatrists, and psychologists engaged in the assessment and treatment of patients with non-epileptic seizures.

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### MCQs on Surgical Diagnosis. By

R Visvanathan and J S P Lumley. (Pp 132; £14.99 paperback.) Butterworth Heinemann, 2000. ISBN 0-7506-4730-2. \*\*\*\*

Visvanathan and Lumley's *MCQs on Surgical Diagnosis* provides a useful revision aid for anyone studying for surgical examinations. It contains a good mix of both factual and clinically based questions, which could help in preparing for both the systems MRCS paper and the clinical examination.

The questions are well structured and easy to understand with accurate answers. The accompanying explanations are concise and informative, making it possible to test oneself without a textbook always on hand. However, the cross referencing to the associated text book (Hamilton Bailey's *Demonstrations of Physical Signs in Clinical Surgery*) is an uncommon but extremely welcome addition to a self assessment text, so that further reading on any of the covered topics is both easily and rapidly accessible.

The topics covered reflect well the day to day conditions encountered in clinical practice, so helping improve diagnostic skills; but also relate reasonably well to some aspects of the MRCS systems modules for written examination preparation.

The only slight shortfall of this book is the lack of pure anatomy, which remains a prominent feature of surgical examinations, although the "scenario based" questions do necessitate both knowledge and application of clinical anatomy, which are extremely relevant to daily clinical practice.

The cost is very comparable to similar books of its nature and, as an accompaniment to other texts and self test books, this publication provides an excellent value for money addition to any trainee surgeon's bookshelf.

E ALLEN

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**The Granulomatous Disorders.** Edited by D Geraint James and Alimuddin Zumla. (Pp 616; £150.) Cambridge University Press, 1999. ISBN 0-521-592216.\*\*\*

This is a review of the pathology of granulomas and granulomatous disease. The editors have a distinguished background in infectious diseases and sarcoidosis and the contributors include leading experts with a truly global perspective.

Granulomatous inflammation is a pathological response to a number of stimuli including infectious agents, foreign body reaction, and diseases of unknown aetiology. Many of these conditions have multisystem manifestations and the editors faced a daunting task in the organisation of this review.

The text is divided into four sections dealing with the biology of granulomas, infectious granulomas, granulomas and disease, and granulomas and body systems. This necessarily leads to a substantial amount of repetition, however it does ensure that disorders are discussed both by aetiology and by systems.

Part 1, which deals with the biology of granulomas, is perhaps the most satisfying section of the text and includes a discussion of the biology and immunology of granulomas, pathological consequences and an excellent and well illustrated chapter on imaging. I found the remainder of the book somewhat disappointing as it included little information that could not be gleaned from a standard medical or infectious diseases textbook. Many of the chapters are simply overviews of irrespective disorders or systems and do not include the in-depth discussion of each condition that one would expect in a text of this size and price.

The chapters vary considerably in style and presentation, however most are well referenced up to 1997 and comprehensively illustrated, although mainly in black and white. Some of the coloured plates are poorly reproduced and more comprehensive explanation in the legends would be helpful. There are many serious errors in the indexing.

So who is this book aimed for? Many clinicians and researchers will be faced with granulomatous disorders in their daily practice and this text is a useful overview. Nevertheless, many will find it contains little new information or critical discussion of current research. This is a book for the library rather than the office.

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### Statistical Analysis in Primary Care.

Edited by Nigel Mathers, Martin Williams, and Beverley Hancock. (Pp 113; £15.95.) Radcliffe Medical Press, 2000. ISBN 1-85775-387-9.\*\*\*

Statisticians who talk in everyday language are significantly hard to find. In this book, edited by a group known for their understanding of the problems of novices, the contributors have been held under fairly tight control to appeal to new researchers. The book nicely compliments their earlier one on developing research (see below).

The strength of this volume lies in its explanation of concepts and I felt myself dipping into it quite successfully for the clarification of problems. The sections on using databases were especially welcome and helpful, although the one on EpiInfo is somewhat less so than the one on SPSS. Throughout the book the pace of explanations is well maintained with the use of practical examples and exercises and it was good to see a reference, albeit a short one, to the use of sampling techniques in qualitative research.

Regrettably for a statistics book, especially one aimed at the novice, gremlins have crept in. The worked example of sample size for test of differences is confusing, with figures and table numbers that do not quite tally up. Presumably not everything always adds up. I suppose the real purpose of a book on statistics is to intimidate the reader into pathetic ignorance; on that basis this is somewhat less threatening, although I would not go so far as to say that it is positively friendly. It's worth getting through.

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### Developing Research in Primary Care.

Edited by Mike Saks, Martin Williams, and Beverley Hancock. (Pp 154; £15.95.) Radcliffe Medical Press, 2000. ISBN 1-85775-397-6.\*\*\*\*

It is unsurprising that many excellent research concepts are lost because of poor planning and execution. Perhaps surprising is that many important advances can be attributed to serendipity rather than forethought. Even then, serendipity, like luck, is likely to assist the experienced researcher. For the novice the journey into research can be daunting and the gap to success as wide a chasm. If every journey does begin with the first step then this book is ideal for those starting.

The early sections on starting projects, seeking funding, and dealing with ethics lucidly unmask these processes. There are also well targeted sections on health needs assessment and implementing research findings likely to be of value to new and experienced researchers.

If there is a problem it is that the authors gloss over some real problems encountered. The otherwise excellent section on ethics does not warn of the frustrations faced by the honest researcher and the difficulties in obtaining the quality supervision and mentoring for new researchers. There is no delineated section on qualitative research,

although this is covered under health needs assessment. However, the book has a task orientated feel appropriate to primary care and is suitable for dipping into.

The useful glossary mentions the "fog index". This calculates a publication's reading age. Based on their formula the reading age of this book ranges from 13 to 16 years between the early and later chapters. The *Sun* newspaper comes in at 12!

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### National Clinical Guidelines for Stroke.

Intercollegiate Working Party for Stroke, Royal College of Physicians. (Pp 150; £15.95.) Lavenham Press, 2000. ISBN 1-86016-120-0.\*\*\*

Stroke is a common problem, being the third cause of mortality in the UK and the leading cause of adult disability with a resultant significant cost burden to the NHS and social services. The guidelines highlight the wide national variation in the implementation of evidence based practice as seen in the Stroke Association's National Survey and the Royal College of Physicians National Sentinel Audit, for instance access to stroke unit care varies between 30% and 70%. Furthermore newer therapies such as thrombolysis and alternative antiplatelet agents are becoming available for use in patients with stroke. The production of *National Clinical Guidelines for Stroke* is therefore timely.

This concise, well written document covers all aspects of the management of patients with stroke including service organisation, acute management issues including diagnosis and interventions, rehabilitation, longer term management issues including secondary prevention, and service evaluation. It also includes a useful section on carers and families which is supported by an information booklet. The presentation of the guidelines is extremely user-friendly with a consistent approach throughout the book with an introduction to the area, relevant guidelines and grading, a tabular presentation of the evidence which summarises the main features of the trials, and recommendations for local implementation.

It is unfortunate that no guidelines are produced for primary prevention of stroke. It is also unfortunate that there is not a consistency in grading of evidence throughout the document, for instance the use of compression stockings in stroke patients acquires a grade A (level 1b) evidence, though the supporting references refer to postoperative and not stroke patients.

Overall, the guidelines are produced in a user-friendly and well referenced fashion to assist local purchasers and providers in the development of an evidence based stroke service. Furthermore the guidelines identify areas of common clinical problems where the evidence is weak—fertile ground for researchers.

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## DIARY

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### 5th Annual Conference on Self Directed Learning in General Practice

24 April 2001: London, UK

Organised by the Open Learning Unit, University College London, and sponsored by the *British Medical Journal*. The conference will be organised around the themes of:

- Revalidation
- Web based learning resources for self directed learning

The day will be based around small group workshops, with some offering hands-on training in the use of online learning resources. Places will therefore be strictly limited and allocated on a first come, firstserved basis. For further details

please contact Marcia Rigby on [m.rigby@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:m.rigby@ucl.ac.uk), tel +44 (0)20 7288 3246, +44 (0)20 7281 8004. A web site is in preparation.

### Research Training and the Young Clinician

26 April 2001: Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh

For further details contact Ms Eileen Strawn on +44 (0)131 225 7324 (tel), +44 (0)131 225 4393 (fax), [e.strawn@rcpe.ac.uk](mailto:e.strawn@rcpe.ac.uk) or visit the web site at [www.rcpe.ac.uk](http://www.rcpe.ac.uk).

### Whittington Hospital and Fellowship of Postgraduate Medicine Conference Unit MRCP Part II (PACES) Communication Skills and Ethics—2 day course

21–22 May 2001: Whittington Hospital, London, UK

The course involves:

- History taking
- Information giving
- Breaking bad news
- Ethics

This is a workshop based course for the new MRCP clinical examination and facilitators include communication skills specialists and MRCP examiners. The cost is £500.

For further details and a booking form please contact Kate Stephens, CHIME, 4th Floor Holborn Union Building, Archway Campus, Highgate Hill, London N19 3UA (tel: 020 7288 3134; email: [k.stephens@chime.ucl.ac.uk](mailto:k.stephens@chime.ucl.ac.uk)).

(Fellowship of Postgraduate Medicine, Registered Charity No 313355, Registered in England No 721213)



## Final FRCA: Multiple Choice Questions.

P SPIERS

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Updated information and services can be found at:  
<http://pmj.bmj.com/content/77/906/286.1.full.html>

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