

Book Reviews

Rob & Smith's Operative Surgery – Trauma Surgery, Parts 1 and 2, 4th edition, general editors: Hugh Dudley, David Carter and R.C.G. Russell, 4th edition. Pp. 952. Butterworths, London, Boston etc., 1989. £122 hard cover.

The high standard established by previous volumes of *Operative Surgery* must make the introduction of new texts a daunting task for the editor. On this occasion they may rest assured that the previous standard has not only been equalled but surpassed. The major contribution to both volumes is from trans-atlantic sources. This is inevitable when the comparative experience of trauma is considered and does not detract from the relevance of the contents to trauma management in the UK. The enthusiasm for use of M.A.S.T. suits is largely not reflected in the UK but I found no other significant differences in clinical practice.

This edition has grown considerably beyond its predecessor with several new chapters, all of which follow the example of lucid illustration accompanied by precise and pertinent text. The presentation of the illustrations is excellent. The recent trend towards coloured photography for demonstrating operative surgery has not undermined the value of the clear form of line drawings so masterly executed here.

Those who seek discussion and many references must look elsewhere but this is not a reflection on a production so clearly orientated toward the practical situation. This is not, however, solely a comprehensive reference manual for the operating surgeon. There is much distilled wisdom on the management of trauma in both general and specific terms. Indeed the chapters addressing general topics, such as 'Principles of Wound Management' should be read by all those concerned with injury in any guise. For the surgeon who operates on trauma, these volumes will prove an indispensable part of his armamentarium. Other books deal with specialist topics in greater depth but these volumes provide unrivalled comprehensive guide to the surgery and management of trauma in all its presentations.

At a time when increasing attention is being focused on trauma care, the arrival of this edition is most timely. The presence of these volumes in both Accident & Emergency Departments and operating theatres and more particularly regular referral to the content by surgeons and Accident & Emergency staff will contribute to an improvement in the management of trauma.

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Pathology of Neck Injury, Peter Vanezis. Pp. x + 133, illustrated. Butterworths, London, Boston, etc., 1989. £45 hardcover.

Many cases of homicide involve injury to the head and neck and pathologists are often requested to express

opinions on modes of injury and causes of death in this area of the body. It is often difficult clearly to define the effect of neck compression and duration of survival before death supervenes. This and similar problems are clearly described in this book which is based upon the author's long experience and a thorough compilation of the reports of other forensic pathologists.

It is a very useful account of injury in a difficult area of the body. There is advice on dissection and demonstration of injuries such as well as their interpretation. There is a good bibliography of key references. The pictures, in black and white, are often, unfortunately, of poor quality and barely show that which the author wishes to demonstrate. No doubt these will be improved in a further edition.

Meanwhile, this book is an important contribution to forensic pathology. It will be mainly of value to pathologists but others such as lawyers, policemen and surgeons will find matters of interest in it.

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Common Medical Diagnoses: An Algorithmic Approach, Patrice M. Healey and Edwin J. Jacobson. Pp. xiv + 203; illustrated. W.B. Saunders Company, Philadelphia, London etc, 1990. £26.50 softback.

The trouble with algorithms is that they reduce everything to 'black or white', 'yes or no' problems. Neither real life nor real medicine is ever quite like that and such an approach is over-simplistic and often misleading. The authors of this book have to some extent overcome this problem by the very useful explanatory notes, by helpful cross references to two standard text books of medicine (Cecil and Harrison) and by bibliographies in some sections.

Some of the algorithms are models of clarity but others are extremely complex and hence confusing; some are surprising with respect to the chosen algorithmic sequence: for example, in investigating a fever of unknown origin, is it really usual practice to test for HIV antibody before checking the drug history, the ESR, autoantibodies, febrile agglutinins or looking for malaria or malignancy? Can one really follow different diagnostic pathways according to whether the ESR is greater or less than 50 mm/h? British readers will also be confused by the unfamiliar units used in the biochemical tests results.

According to the preface the book is aimed at medical students and house officers 'an aid in learning clinical medicine'. As such it could be dangerously misleading if the busy clinician follows the algorithm too uncritically or, taking shortcuts, fails to read the explanatory notes carefully. The authors indicate that the book provides 'a framework for a cost-effective approach to clinical medicine'; however, if the algorithms are taken too literally, a lot of time (and hence expense) could be wasted



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