

## 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

**Medical statistics – a commonsense approach**, 3rd edn, M J Campbell. 203 pp. John Wiley, 1999. £16.99, paperback. ISBN 0 471 98721 2. ★★★★★

This book outlines the principles and uses of medical statistics and their applications in analysing epidemiological and clinical studies. The initial text describes the different kinds of study designs, the methods for describing and presenting data, and the types of statistical inference. The second half of the book describes how to analyse case-control studies, cohort studies and randomised controlled trials. There are chapters on regression techniques and common pitfalls in statistics and finally appendices on statistical formulae and tables. There are also summary sections and self-assessment exercises.

The book is clearly written with an abundance of examples which help greatly in the understanding of statistical principles. The text is extremely comprehensive, covering classical statistics as well as more recent developments. The major strength of the book is that it shows how epidemiology and statistics are two very much related disciplines in medical research. The book will be of value to those just starting a study of statistics and epidemiology as well as to those with more experience who will find it a valuable reference source. I would thoroughly recommend the book, which is competitively priced.

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**Current problems in epilepsy. Vol 15, Benign childhood partial seizures and related epileptic syndromes**, CP Panayiotopoulos. 406 pp. London: John Libbey & Company Ltd, 1999. £60, hardback. ISBN 0 86196 577 9. ★★★★★

Despite previous well-presented descriptions of the characteristics of the benign partial epilepsies of childhood, these conditions, which are much commoner than childhood absence epilepsy, are under-recognised. Panayiotopoulos has had a long-standing interest in seizures secondary to occipital discharges. Since his first publications appeared more than 20 years ago, he has added continuously to the literature on benign occipital and other benign partial epilepsies of childhood. In addition, his studies on photosensitivity and associated disorders have expanded knowledge in these areas. The 837

references cited bear witness to the breadth of scholarship which has gone into the preparation of the current text, which is without rival in this field. There is liberal and very helpful use of illustrative case histories. For the occipital epilepsies, there are descriptions of the syndromes, initially delineated in a useful table and later expanded in detailed chapters. In addition, the causes of symptomatic occipital epilepsies are briefly reviewed. Much is made of common confusions between migraine and occipital seizures. Case histories and a table highlight the differences: the importance of careful assessment of the history is repeatedly emphasised. Severe variants of the benign epilepsies are addressed, and the terminology is clearly defined. Numerous electroencephalograms are carefully described. General paediatricians, who are those most likely to see the child at presentation, as well as paediatric epileptologists, should obtain personal copies.

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**Key topics in orthopaedic trauma surgery**, GS Keene, AHN Robinson, MG Bowditch, DJ Edwards. 308 pp. Bios Scientific Publishers, 1999. £23.95, paperback. ISBN 1 85996 291 2. ★★★★★

The 100 topics covered in this excellent volume have been selected for their relevance to modern orthopaedic trauma management. It is not intended as a comprehensive reference text but as an overview of essential core knowledge required. It achieves this superbly. I would unreservedly recommend it to every orthopaedic and accident and emergency specialist registrar and senior house officer.

The format selects key topics and has short chapters under the main headings. The format is one of salient fact rather than free-flowing text. It is therefore perfect for revision or reading while travelling. Basic science topics, such as biomaterials and properties of bone are covered in a logical fashion. Common fractures and the complications that can occur are dealt with comprehensively. The space given to common and uncommon conditions is similar and so intracapsular fractures of the proximal femur receive the same amount of text as tarsal dislocations.

Topics on the principles of management relevant to the general care of the multiply injured patient are well covered. A minor

criticism would be that trauma care involves the pre-hospital management and rehabilitation of patients and there is no specific mention of this. I particularly enjoyed the brief synopsis, up to date classifications, and references where relevant. Areas where controversies of management exist are discussed avoiding didactic argument and guiding the reader to the appropriate text. This book is excellent value for money and precisely hits the spot for the intended audience.

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**Implementing clinical guidelines – a practical guide**, Debra Humphris, Peter Littlejohns, eds. 182 pp. Radcliffe Medical Press Ltd, 1999. £18.95, paperback. ISBN 1 85775 293 7. ★★

Although guidelines play an important role in clinical governance their limitations are well known. This publication examines the problem of implementation by evaluating Assisting Clinical Effectiveness programmes at 13 sites in the South Thames Region where guidelines were implemented. Six of these projects are reported at length.

A number of conclusions are reached. Unsurprisingly, implementation was limited by inadequate practical guideline development. There were problems with critical appraisal skills when guidelines were produced without adequate methodological rigour. The financial costs of implementation and appraisal were often considerable and there were problems in matching project facilitator skills and salary scale available to the needs of the project. There are problems in finding an appropriate educational strategy; in particular, it was difficult to get general practitioners together. A one-to-one approach is recommended, although clearly labour intensive. The project team, unsurprisingly, has to be credible clinically to the target practitioners.

This publication inevitably reflects parochial and personal interests at the sites involved. Many of the problems faced in the introduction of guidelines and their assessment, both initially and those that attempt to close the audit loop, are not unexpected. The book will be of interest mainly to those in both primary and secondary healthcare who are faced with implementation of guidelines.

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## Medical statistics – a commonsense approach

A HART

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