Book Reviews


When I first came from Spain to practice in a British hospital I found it very difficult to communicate efficiently with my patients and colleagues. Had this volume been available then, I feel my problems would have been substantially reduced.

Doctors wishing to communicate effectively with patients often find difficulty not only with the language barrier but also with inaccurate definitions provided by many dictionaries. Additionally, patients feel uncomfortable with doctors who do not speak their language.

Medicine is an ever-changing science. As new research, clinical experience, pharmacology and therapies expand our knowledge, there is a need for up-to-date, accurate and explicit definitions in medical terminology. This dictionary contains more than 20,000 entries, including medical and technical words and translations, sections on simplified English and Spanish grammar, tips on pronunciation, appendices of weights, measures and numbers, signs and symptoms in common disorders and a useful list of phrases dealing with everyday situations.

The authors provide us with a well-written volume with clear and concise definitions. Its readily accessible, pocket-sized format will make it easy to use during daily medical practice. The clear and approachable style makes this dictionary useful to all medical and health care professionals as well as interested laymen.

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This year 82 authors (including one from the UK) reviewed 40 topics of wide interest. The first is an instructive assessment of the first 9 years of heart–lung and single and double lung transplantation listing indications and discussing choice of procedure, patient selection, timing of the lung transplant and the results. Later, there is an article on the infectious and non-infectious pulmonary complications of transplantation. The difficulties in the diagnosis and management of chronic interstitial lung disease secondary to collagen vascular diseases are discussed in a well-referenced article. An account of the solitary pulmonary nodule will be particularly useful for physicians in training but remembering that histoplasmosa and coccidiodoïduma rare in the UK. Also, there are useful reports on histiocytes X, a new species (strain TWAR) of chlamydia pneumonia, and principles of ventilator use in respiratory failure.

There are accounts of anti-platelet agents and new anti-thrombins, and of promising developments in the drug therapy for inflammatory bowel disease. Molecular biology is represented by topics such as G6PD variants, the molecular basis of colon cancer, microbial nucleic acids as diagnostic tools and haemoglobin switching in haemoglobinopathies. A chapter on the assessment of syncope stresses the value of tilt-table testing. A timely review of the management of carotid disease comparing endarterectomy with medical treatment for carotid stenosis warns of the often associated cardiovascular risk-factors with atherosclerosis of other arteries.

This is an interesting and recommendable review of the current medical scene.

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Many patients whose basic complaint is fatigue are referred to a wide variety of specialists ranging from physicians to microbiologists and even psychoneuro-immunologists. The variety of diagnostic labels attached to the syndromes is extensive and reflects lack of medical unanimity. The editors opt for ‘postviral fatigue syndrome’ (historically in the United States Epstein–Barr virus was favoured whereas in the United Kingdom Coxsackie viruses were popularly blamed), although the chapter on treatment opts for ‘chronic fatigue syndrome’.

There are problems with fatigue. How does one define it? (I am fatigued, you are tired, they are weak . . . ) How does one differentiate between mental and physical fatigue? How does one quantify either of these two types? How does either relate to muscle weakness?

The two extreme views on the aetiology of this condition (or these conditions) are ‘it is all in the brain’ and ‘it is all in the mind’. Needless to say the brain and the mind are inseparably integrated, and no doctor should minimize a patient’s suffering no matter what the aetiology.

The editors have been very fair in including most views (although the ME Society is, probably correctly, not a contributor).

Inevitably and correctly the 15 chapters do contain some contradictions and this enhances the book. The best chapters are those that ask the right questions and do not answer them – in the current state of ignorance no one could or should attempt to give the answer, far less be dogmatic. History alone will judge which contributors will turn out to be correct and which incorrect, but in the meantime this book provides an authoritative statement of current areas of knowledge, ignorance and controversy which should stimulate all readers.

The chapter on treatment is comprehensive and concludes that there is no definitive therapy for all patients but the vast majority of patients make a full and complete recovery. Perhaps the doctor’s role is to exclude classical
illness and support all patients through the stressful time they undoubtedly experience.

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This Illustrated Guide to the Knee is beautifully presented. The text is easy to read and integrates extremely well with the beautifully prepared illustrations.

The preface states that the work reviews primary information for the orthopaedic resident and attending physician and as such it achieves its objectives. The basic science chapters, the chapter on physical examination and the presentation on surgical approaches, ligaments, menisci and fractures are excellent. However, I found the work deficient in its considerations of the issues of clinical management.

Accepting, however, that the book is designed to give basic primary information it achieves this objective perfectly and with its extensive bibliography offers adequate stimulation for the interested reader to pursue individual subjects in greater detail.

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This book tackles theoretical analysis, research findings, and clinical application of a wide range of different problems. In Chapter 8 the author makes a laudable attempt to synthesize the personal construct theory with other theoretical perspectives.

In 1955, as had become fashionable, perhaps rather belatedly, George Kelly put forward the personal construct theory which hoped to take as its subject the whole person, rather than just taking a fragment of a person's functioning, whether physical or psychological. The author, who is the district clinical psychologist in Barnet Health Authority, tells us that he has been using personal construct psychology for 20 years in his clinical research and practice. The preface insists that this publication is not a 'cookbook'. Nevertheless, the book contains some useful guidance for those who are familiar with the general theory, and for those who are not, a summary is contained in the first chapter. Chapter 2 contains some interesting assessment techniques which might perhaps have a wider application, but personally I found the latter part of the book of greater interest. This looks at diagnostic assessment, guidance in the use of the grid and examples of therapeutic applications. His discussion of movement and resistance to movement in therapy is one of the most interesting parts of the book, especially the difficulties that may arise when the therapeutic approach is inconsistent with the client's view of the world, or the therapist's construct differs markedly from the client's own. This must be of particular importance to those of us that spend much of our time and energy attempting to help those who come from backgrounds that differ greatly from our own, whether geographically or socially.

To conclude, the introduction informs us that this will serve as a major reference work. I feel there are probably two books here - one a reference book discussing the theory and the research and the validity of the research, and another on the clinical application. This will not necessarily appeal to the same readers.

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This is indeed an 'important' guide to areas in child health, including sections on a child's developmental and emotional needs, the major body systems and what may go wrong with them, accident prevention and lastly an extremely useful glossary of terms applicable to common paediatric health problems.

Although the book is intended primarily for parents and carers - and in this respect it is very user-friendly for the non-professional - I think it would be an invaluable aid in nursery and infants schools, where teachers or helpers may be faced with children who have unfamiliar diagnoses attached to them. Health visitors also may find it useful as a brief guide to situations they encounter regularly.

The chapter dealing with first aid expertly spells out the essential basic steps in cardio-pulmonary resuscitation and is certain to encourage good practice. It should enable interested readers to feel sufficiently confident to initiate resuscitation if the need arises.

I also found the suggestion of a regular 'safety audit' of a household or establishment to have great merit, with the aim of reducing childhood accidents.

Criticisms are few. No mention is made of recent guidelines for parents on how to reduce the risks of sudden death in infancy, nor is there any reference to the hazards of overheating the baby, though hypothermia gets a mention. The paragraph on tracheo-oesophageal fistula includes the statement that the baby will splutter when given a first feed. Possibly some mention should be made of warning signs which may hopefully alert the carer to withhold the first feed and to seek a diagnosis. Genetic conditions are mentioned briefly but without any discussion of recurrence risks or appropriate counselling, e.g. muscular dystrophy, achondroplasia. The section on jaundice in the young infant misses the opportunity to stress to parents and professionals the need for urgent referral for investigation in the case of possible obstructive jaundice associated with biliary atresia, since the prognosis is dependent upon surgery within the first 10