

Book Reviews

ABC of Dermatology, 2nd edition, edited by P.K. Buxton. Pp. 98, illustrated. British Medical Association, London, 1993. Paperback, £12.95.

Whose paintings approximate to reality, Titian's or those of Turner? Are the visual extravaganzas of Picasso more accurate than those of Da Vinci? Whose eyes sees more clearly? Similar questions must be asked of dermatology textbooks, especially the ever-increasing number of introductory texts. Lots of pretty or not so pretty pictures bolster one's vicarious disease data base for engaging in ever more complicated games of clinical snap. The second edition of this popular book, which originally appeared as a series in the *British Medical Journal*, is very much in the tradition that believes that the best way to learn dermatology is to see lots of clinical photographs along with accompanying text. Despite what previous reviewers have said, this is not a small book. A staggering amount of information is presented, including hundreds of pictures. Many of the clinical photographs are good, but many of them, I suspect, will only make sense if you know what you are looking for. This begs the question of who the book is written for. Experienced GPs may find it useful to dip into, but I doubt if the book will significantly decrease the sense of alienation many of them feel as patients with rashes enter their consulting room. What of medical students? Medical students always say that they like lots of pictures, but contrary to popular belief, students may claim to know what they want but they certainly don't know what they need. This book can't be recommended to them as a primary text simply because it provides far too much information in an unstructured way; it reads as an avuncular description of rashes rather than as a textbook of dermatology. Students would do better to look at John Burton's *Essentials of Dermatology*, or the Hunter, Savin and Dahl *Clinical Dermatology* text, and dip into a *Wolff Colour Atlas* as appropriate. Of course it depends on whether you want the students to recognize the artifacts or understand the images.

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ABC of Colorectal Diseases, edited by D.J. Jones and M.H. Irving. Pp. 103, illustrated. British Medical Association, London, 1993. Paperback, £6.95.

ABC of Colorectal Diseases is an incredibly good buy! For less than £7 one can purchase a soft-backed book which is heavily illustrated in colour consisting of over 100 pages of text with short pithy articles which review comprehensively the present practice of medicine and surgery in colorectal diseases.

Many will have already read and enjoyed the articles in the *British Medical Journal* from which this book has been compiled. Each chapter consists of a brief critique of a clinical problem with concise information on aetiology, pathogenesis, presentation and treatment. Each chapter is thoroughly up-to-date. Inevitably there is a rather strong surgical element to this text to cover conditions such as rectal prolapse, pilonidal sinus, perianal fistula, rectal cancer, haemorrhoids and even appendicitis. Nevertheless, there are also some important medical and epidemiological subjects that are admirably covered such as constipation, incontinence, sexually transmitted disease, tropical coloproctology, diarrhoea, colorectal problems in the elderly and drugs in the management of coloproctological disorders.

This is a thoroughly English book, one might even venture to suggest that it is a North West England book since most of the contributors emanate from Manchester or from referral links within the North West Regional Health Authority. The excellent contributions contained therein only go to emphasize that most of our regions are now self-contained in providing internationally accredited advice, training and treatment within each system-based discipline.

These pithy accounts of common clinical disorders are a delight to read. The colour photographs enormously enhance the profile of this useful little text. This book will be of benefit to medical students, nursing staff, stomatology therapists, surgeons in training, and even gastroenterologists. The editors and the *British Medical Journal*, in particular, are to be congratulated for producing such an inexpensive, useful and beautifully illustrated book.

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Annual Review of Medicine, Selected Topics in the Clinical Sciences, Vol. 44, edited by W.P. Creger. Pp. x+542, illustrated. Annual Reviews Inc., Palo Alto, CA, 1993. Hardback, £49.00.

The Annual Review Series founded over 60 years ago aims to provide rapid high-quality reviews at relatively low cost.

The current review of medicine for 1993 reveals 42 different topics ranging from the diagnosis and treatment of panic disorder to the molecular biology of cystic fibrosis. There is understandably a wide variation both in the quality and depth of the reviews and there is certainly no common theme.

As a general physician, I found the clinically orientated discussions on current approaches to treatment of Parkinson's disease and anti-inflammatory therapy for asthma most helpful. As a gastroenterologist, I was very

disappointed by the short review on primary sclerosing cholangitis, which included references only up to 1990. Particularly frustrating was the lack of editorial guidance to the various authors, for instance, the section on laparoscopic cholecystectomy included details of technique which is surely of little relevance to the average physician. The main advantage of this volume is its relatively low price and therefore the series can be recommended to hospital libraries, but the individual physician would be better subscribing to a few journals for more even editorial content.

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Fraud and Misconduct in Medical Research, edited by S. Lock and F. Wells. Pp. 200. British Medical Journal, London, 1993. Hardback, £24.95.

This small book addresses the problems of fraud in science and particularly medicine. It provides an overview of the subject from various perspectives and is authoritative, well written and well referenced.

The modern recognition of misconduct in medical research dates from 1974 when Summerlin used a felt-tip to fake a black skin transplant on a white mouse, although previous examples of fraud such as Sir Cyril Burt's invention of data on twins and Piltown Man are also noted.

The motives for dishonest practice are variously examined, but boil down to greed and pressure to publish. The monograph studies various ways in which fraud may be controlled but does not consider the most sensible option of dramatically reducing the number of publications: by removing at least half of the journals cited by *Index Medicus* and restricting the number of papers quoted for a senior medical or scientific post to between 6–10, as well as restricting the number of authors per paper.

This is a good, interesting book, although not a 'ripping

good yarn', with lots of good anecdotes. 'Betrayers of the Truth' by Broad and Wade is more fun but it is not as authoritative.

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ABC of Diabetes, 3rd edition, P.K. Buxton. Pp. 56, illustrated. British Medical Association, London, 1993. Paperback, £7.95.

This remains an excellent practical guide for the management of diabetes. Changes in this edition include a helpful discussion of the indications for insulin in non-insulin-dependent patients. With increasing awareness that there is more to diabetes than hyperglycaemia, management aims now include the control of hyperlipidaemia and hypertension. One controversial recommendation is for routine screening of all pregnant women for gestational diabetes but with a high 2 hour blood glucose cut-off level of 9 mmol/l. More selective screening with a lower cut-off may be more effective. There is recognition of the organization of care of the essential role of nurses who feature above dieticians, chiropodists and doctors in the text though not in the accompanying table.

I would find the book more readable if it were set out conventionally rather than in the jumbled way that the *British Medical Journal* seems to require for its ABC series. The photographs illustrating insulin injection technique and blood glucose monitoring are much clearer than in the previous edition. On the other hand, many of the illustrations are unclear and superfluous. What is the purpose of a line drawing of a telephone (although the advice to give patients your home telephone number is welcome), or a packet of contraceptive pills, or a photograph of an ophthalmoscope, and why has the section on necrobiosis been moved from the complications section to the chapter on the assessment of diabetes?

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