

Book reviews

Accident and emergency medicine

Key topics in accident and emergency medicine, PG Howarth, RJ Evans. pp ix + 320. Bios Scientific, Oxford, 1994. £20.00, paperback

This book contains 91 topics chosen by the authors because of their perceived importance in accident and emergency medicine. The topics are both referenced and adequately cross-referenced. Most of the information contained is uncontroversial, and nationally adopted guidelines and ATLS and ACLS protocols have been generally adhered to. There is a lack of clarity in some recommendations, as for example the need for taking ankle X-rays for assessing sprained ankles is uncritically stated.

As the authors note, coverage is not comprehensive. Some key topics have thus not been included, such as the assessment of the elderly, the management of the confused, violent or psychotic patient, and the assessment of injuries to the hand, hip, knee (apart from a discussion of anterior knee pain) and elbow. The incompletely validated baby-check system for assessing infants has been included.

The balance is somewhat uneven, with five pages on meningitis, four on headache and two on migraine, under separate headings.

The book can be recommended for use by accident and emergency trainees and in accident and emergency departmental libraries. It would not, however, be a good first buy for casualty officers.

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Certification of doctors

The certification and recertification of doctors: issues in the assessment of clinical competence, D Newble, B Jolly, R Wakeford, eds. pp 249. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993. £37.50, hardback

The certification and recertification of doctors is a compilation of papers from the fifth conference dealing with the assessment of doctors' competence to practise, held in Adelaide in 1991. The primary object of the meeting was to review developments in assessment methodology and their relevance to the current practices of the universities, colleges and specialty bodies. In recent years there have been strident political and public calls for tighter controls of both retraining and reskilling within the medical profession and discussions as to how this can best be done are therefore pertinent.

Unfortunately, although this book contains useful background information, in addition to the new material generated by the conference, about methods used for initial certification of clinical competence and recertification, it is repetitious and contains much overlapping material. Consequently, though the collection of papers may appeal to the specialist educationalist, its prolix style will discourage

those general readers whose task is to implement those 'long overdue changes' in undergraduate and postgraduate education which we all feel are necessary.

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Clinical endocrinology

Clinical endocrinology, 2 edn, GM Besser, MO Thorner, illustrated. Mosby-Wolfe, London, 1994. £99.00, hardback

This second edition compiled by Professors Besser and Thorner from the Barts school has 30 eminent contributors from three continents who are endocrinologists, biochemists, a pathologist, radiologists, and obstetricians. The 25 chapters are authoritative summaries on many aspects of endocrinology and the book has moved on from its concept of 'a slide atlas, expanded by text'. There are chapters depicting X-rays, histopathology slides, CT and MRI scans which are of high quality and a helpful one on hormone assay techniques, as well as conventional coverage of endocrine topics. Three new chapters on the testis, ectopic hormone production and lipids are excellent welcome additions.

The strength of this book lies in its authoritative clarity, vivid use of colour, clear tables and lovely clinical illustrations. This, with its ability to bring physiology, biochemistry and clinical medicine together, makes it delightful to refer to. It is a 'must' for medical school/postgraduate libraries, all rich serious students of endocrinology, particularly those preparing for MRCP. It will have greater appeal to consultants if the text and bibliography are expanded, but this is a difficult balancing act.

Further welcome chapters on genetics and endocrine myopathies are suggested for future additions. The latter subject is poorly represented and the clinical features of myopathies, especially muscle hypertrophy and pain, means of investigating muscle structure and function are ignored, except in Chapter 2. The whole, however, is an excellent balance, beautifully presented and the authors are congratulated on achieving 'an elegant summary of thought in endocrinology'.

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Contraception

Contraception – your questions answered, 2nd edn, J Guillebaud. pp 484. Churchill Livingstone, London, 1993. £12.95, paperback

This is a revised, updated and considerably expanded second edition of Professor John Guillebaud's successful 1985 'questions and answers' text, with an intended readership of

general practitioners, family planning doctors and nurses, and others involved in advising on and providing contraception. It is a clearly structured book which provides sensible answers to the questions most commonly posed by patients and some providers regarding contraception. The range of currently available methods is covered and the author is not dismissive of natural methods although their potential unreliability is stressed. Current thinking is noted on the reduced risks of combined oral contraceptives, IUDs and the lessened anxieties relating to injectables. The book also discusses the female condom, RU486 as an emergency contraceptive measure, the LNG-IUD which should shortly become widely available, and the subdermal implant, Norplant. However, the development of truly new methods of contraception is felt to be disappointing.

Detailed discussion of the emotional and psychosexual aspects of contraception is omitted only for reasons of space and these crucial aspects of contraception are implicit in every chapter. Indeed, the much-expanded final chapter has a welcome discussion of compliance and non-compliance, advice for the under-16s, postpartum contraception, contraception for older women, and the ways in which busy medical practitioners might consider improving their family planning service. Overall, this is a very useful book, even if the question and answer presentation may not appeal to all. It is well written, clearly illustrated and to be recommended to all interested in contraception and reproductive choice.

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Free radicals in medicine

Free radicals in medicine, TF Slater, KH Cheeseman, eds. pp 320, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, London, 1993. £49.95, hardback. ISBN 4430 49262

This book, published in 1993, is Number 3 of Volume 49 in the well-known series of expert reviews of the British Medical Bulletin, and it lives up to the reputation which this series has acquired. It is well edited by Dr KH Cheeseman and the late Professor TF Slater and provides an excellent review of the current state of understanding of the role that free radicals play in a wide range of pathologies. The individual chapters are well written and benefit from clear diagrams. The only misprint discovered was the failure to conserve charge in the second reaction equation on page 484, where the right side O_2^- should be O_2 .

One of the more useful features is the description of the current limitations in our knowledge of the exact role and importance of free radicals in the systems described, with indications of trials underway and of work still to be done. The significance of high or low levels of the various antioxidant defence mechanisms is well tackled, and the importance of studying antioxidants as a collective