

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

defence mechanism, rather than individually, is well described, as well as the differences between the various organ systems. The final chapter gives a particularly good description of the concept of the 'therapeutic window', while the penultimate chapter steers us through the epidemiological role of antioxidants in cancer and cardiovascular disease. From prematurity to ageing, and in virtually all important illnesses in between, the role of free radicals is very well described and referenced.

This book is one which I wholeheartedly recommend to anyone interested in modern medicine, and I shall certainly be keeping it within easy reach.

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Immunology

Annual review of immunology, vol 12, WE Paul, C Garrison Fathman, H Metzger, eds. pp 1093, illustrated. Annual Reviews, Palo Alto, California, 1994. £25.00, hardback

This volume is for the most part a compendium of immensely detailed and, for the selective reader, potentially invaluable information at a bargain price. If, as Francis Crick has recently pointed out, 'there is no form of prose more difficult to understand and more tedious to read than the average scientific paper', how much more true this is of even the best annual reviews. There is hardly anything in this book which one would actually read for pleasure but a noble exception is Polly Matzinger's essay on tolerance which is recommended even to Trust Hospital accountants. There are few contributions tailor-made for specific clinical specialists, though Bochner *et al*'s chapter on the immunology of asthma is immaculately authoritative. Most of the chapters deal with topics which will educate rather than instruct clinicians. Thus Pfeffer and Mak's exposition on transgenic technology is a window on the future for thinking doctors. Nor will any rheumatologist who blithely scribbles a request for 'anti-DNA antibodies' ever underestimate the awesome complexities of this subject after consulting Radic and Weigert's analysis of the genetics of anti-DNA antibody production. In short, this is an Olympian reference work for very selective reading.

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Medical procedures

Procedures in practice, NA Scott, ed. pp xii + 272, illustrated. British Medical Journal, London, 1994. £14.95, paperback

Mr Scott has put together a very useful small textbook which will fit nicely into the pocket of a white coat. Twenty-five of the most frequently undertaken procedures are discussed in appropriate depth by authors who obviously have wide experience of the techniques they are describing. These vary from straightforward ones such as basic cardiac life support with which all doctors should be familiar, to others which fall into more specialised areas such as peritoneal dialysis.

In general, all the procedures are well described and the illustrations are clear and to the point. Included in each chapter are sections outlining the indications for the procedure as well as details of the contra-indications, complications, etc.

Mr Scott does not suggest that merely by reading the book one can become adept at a procedure. However, this book will provide a great deal of help for young doctors who, in an emergency situation, may be faced with having to attempt an invasive, investigative/therapeutic procedure with which they are not entirely familiar.

Inevitably, people will regret the absence of descriptions of certain procedures and, as someone who works in emergency medicine, I should have liked to have seen sections on such things as intraosseous infusions, cut-downs, regional nerve blocks, diagnostic peritoneal lavage, etc. Unfortunately, however, there is no doubt that to be completely comprehensive Mr Scott would have needed to produce a book three times the size of the one which is presently available.

Mr Scott has made a very good selection and his book can be strongly recommended for all junior hospital doctors and many general practitioners. Certainly my copy has already been borrowed by members of the junior staff who have commended the accessibility of the information and its usefulness.

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Minimal access surgery

Minimal access general surgery, D Rosin, ed. pp 250, illustrated. Radcliffe Medical Press, Oxford, 1994. £45.00, hardback

This important book brings together contributions from eminent surgeons in England, Europe and the USA to produce a state of the art textbook for minimal access general surgery.

Each chapter is written by an established authority and deals with a different laparoscopic procedure. Although each contribution stands on its own, when taken together a rounded view of the subject is obtained. Laparoscopic appendicectomy is described in detail in two separate contributions but there is surprisingly little repetition in the book as a whole. It would have been interesting to have a longer section on laparoscopic colonic surgery and a chapter on the current state of instrumentation and its proposed development would be useful.

The exciting historical review and the chapter on laparoscopic hernia repair are perhaps the high spots of this comprehensive volume which is a cornerstone for those with an interest in this rapidly expanding specialty.

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Molecular biology of digestive disease

Molecular biology of digestive disease, P Quirke, ed. pp 128, illustrated. British Medical Journal, London, 1994. £12.95, paperback. ISBN 07279 0827 8

Molecular technology has expanded the horizons of all parts of medical practice in an extraordinary way during the 1980s and the revolution will continue. Gastroenterology has not been spared from these advances although clinical practice has been little affected so far. This is about to change and the purpose of this book is to acquaint clinical gastroenterologists with the science of molecular biology in relation to potential areas of gastroenterological interest. Dr Quirke and his authors, largely derived from Leeds, have concentrated on oncology, infection and genetics but Professor Williamson contributes a short piece on gene therapy at the end.

Does the book succeed in fulfilling its aims? I am not sure, but at least there are some useful contributions which should be of great help to a clinician trying hard to understand what all the new science is about. The chapter by Foster and Thomas on the hepatitis B virus and how mutants arise, and that on colorectal neoplasia by Scott and Quirke are excellent. Other chapters are uneven – either providing too much detail or being rather facile to the point of 'talking down' to the reader or, worse still, reading as if it were written for publication in a Sunday newspaper.

The major problem we all have with molecular biology is its language and concepts. To overcome this, a glossary of terms is provided and this is outstandingly good. My only comment would be that this should have introduced the book as a chapter on the techniques rather than just brief definitions.

To sum up, this book is well worth reading by anyone who is struggling to understand the contributions that molecular science is making to clinical gastroenterology. The best chapter will stimulate and inform such readers. Its brevity and cheapness are additional attributes.

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Neurological emergencies

Neurological emergencies, RAC Hughes, ed. pp viii + 359, illustrated. British Medical Journal, London, 1994. £19.95, paperback

Neurological emergencies is a compilation of 13 invited but peer reviewed articles that appeared in the *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery, and Psychiatry* in 1993. The first 12 topics cover the range of acute neurology: acute visual failure, cerebral infection, coma, stroke, tonic-clonic status epilepticus and neuromuscular respiratory paralysis are dealt with by neurologists; cord compression, subarachnoid haemorrhage, head injury and raised intracranial pressure by neurosurgeons, and acute confusional states and behavioural disturbances by psychiatrists. The final chapter, some would argue appropriately for a book on neurological emergencies, summarises the diagnosis of brainstem death.

Neurological emergencies are usually managed initially by non-neurologists and neurology is the major speciality where admitting general medical staff tend to feel least confident. This makes particularly welcome a book that gives guidance on the diagnosis and management of these common emergencies. Some chapters are better than others at giving appropriate and clear guidelines: the chapter on tonic-clonic status, for instance, goes through management step-by-step with strong recommendations and details, including drug doses. Contributions