Book reviews

Sports medicine

ABC of sports medicine, G McLatchie, M Harries, J King, C Williams, eds. pp vii+109, illustrated. BMJ, London, 1995. £14.95, paperback

This book has been aimed at doctors with an interest in sports medicine but who do not consider themselves specialists. As a main objective, this book has achieved its goal. It is easily read without being simplistic and sufficient time is devoted to explanation without being patronising.

The book would serve any practicing health professional with easy off-the-shelf, up-to-date reference and I, for one, will have it handy in my place of work. It is no replacement for hands-on practical experience, but provides criteria for recognition and a balanced guide for advice to be given.

I was particularly pleased to see a short section on musculo-skeletal injuries in child athletes. With the school curriculum encouraging physical activity once again, the general practitioner is bound to see more in the way of minor childhood injuries. It obviously is extremely important to sort out these promptly and return the child to the arena once more. My enthusiasm for the child in activity is mirrored by the section entitled *Fitness for older people*. Ideally I would have liked to see a different word than 'fitness' heading this chapter, but this is of small concern compared to the health message that is conveyed through the maintenance of physical activity in the more senior years.

I was pleased to see that, on the whole, practical examples were used wherever possible and the exercise physiology was kept to a minimum.

All in all, *ABC of sports medicine* provides a good introduction to sports medicine and should encourage more health professionals to take an interest in the subject, rather than side-line it as a 'specialty'.

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Brain death

ABC of brainstem death, 2nd edn, C Pallis, DH Harley. pp ix+52, illustrated. BMJ, London, 1996. £10.95, paperback

The first edition of this book was produced partly in response to the damaging 1980 Panorama programme *Transplants - are the donors really dead?* The second edition underlines the conceptual advances made by the public and by the medical profession since then, allowing the authors (and their readers) to explore issues surrounding brainstem death in more depth.

The book opens with a lucid presentation of the historical evolution of the concept of death, from a 'classic' death (ie, asystole) to the concept that the necessary and sufficient component of death is death of the brainstem. Further chapters explore the prognosis of brainstem-dead patients when ventilation is continued, and the differences between British practice and practice in other countries, notably the US. There is an authoritative and convincing defence of the UK code of practice.

The authors' stated aim is to keep 'both feet firmly on clinical grounds'. The chapters describing the diagnosis of death, the potential pitfalls that arise, and clarifying the declaration of death, successfully fulfil this aim. The last chapter in the book deals with the patient as organ donor, and with donor maintenance. These sections provide complete clinical guidelines, although I would have welcomed more detailed explanation at some points.

As with all of the books in the 'ABC' series, the presentation is a model of clarity. Boxes summarising major points of the text appear beside most paragraphs, and there are clear diagrams and up-to-date references. Everyone in the medical and allied professions who first confronts our ability to support artificially corpses whose hearts still beat is disturbed by the experience. This book will go a long way towards answering the questions of the novice to intensive therapy, in a straightforward and thoughtful way.

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Epilepsy

The treatment of epilepsy, S Shorvon, F Dreifuss, D Fish, D Thomas, eds. pp xiv+835, illustrated. Blackwell Science, Oxford, 1996. £99.50, hardback

It is not that long ago that textbooks of epilepsy tended to concentrate on diagnostic issues because of the relatively few therapeutic options available to clinicians. Whilst not ignoring this important area, the title of this book accurately reflects the different balance within its 835 pages. Although there are contributions from many of the world's leading epileptologists this is not an 'ivory tower' book. The separation of the chapters on principles of treatment in particular clinical situations (eg, newly diagnosed pa-

tients, those in remission, those with other medical conditions, children, pregnancy, the elderly) from those giving a detailed analysis of the newer anti-epileptic drugs, means that one can generally find the information that one wants to manage a patient quickly and easily, without having to wade through pages of detailed pharmacology! For this reason, I think this is a book that will be used in everyday practice and I expect to find our departmental copy on the desks of senior house officers more often than it is on the shelves. The chapters on the individual anti-epileptic drugs do their best to apply the principles of evidence-based medicine, although properly conducted 'head-to-head' trials of different anti-epileptic drugs in specific clinical situations still remain few and far between.

Just over one third of the book is devoted to issues surrounding surgery for epilepsy. Whilst it is good to have a readily accessible account of the various procedures, I suspect that the detail in many of the chapters will only be of use to those with a special interest in epilepsy. Nevertheless, overall this is an excellent book which is well set out, adequately illustrated and represents very good value for the price. It should certainly be in every library but I suspect there will also be a substantial number of copies bought for departmental or personal use.

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Sexually transmitted diseases

ABC of sexually transmitted diseases, 3rd edn, Michael W Adler, ed. pp 80, illustrated. BMJ, London, 1996. £13.95, paperback

The third edition of this book in the BMA's ABC series provides a comprehensive review of the sexually transmitted diseases. It has excellent up-to-date chapters on HIV and viral hepatitis. The other chapters have also been revised and provide excellent, clearly written, and easy to understand coverage of the subject matter. The layout of text, content and explanation given, colour photographs, and use of tables and highlight boxes to emphasise key points make it easy to read and understand. This edition continues to set and exceed the standards achieved in earlier editions and comes very highly recommended. It should be of interest and value to a very wide audience, including general practitioners, hospital doctors, nurses, and all healthcare workers managing patients with sexually transmitted diseases. It is an excellent book for the nonspecialist postgraduate and provides a valuable aid to accurate diagnosis and effective treatment of the sexually transmitted diseases and of what is a complex and increasingly important area of medicine. At the price, it also represents excellent value for money and deserves a place in all medical libraries.

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