PostScript

BOOK REVIEWS

The reviewers have been asked to rate these books in terms of four items: readability, how up to date they are, accuracy and reliability, and value for money, using simple four point scales. From their opinions we have derived an overall "star" rating: * = poor, ** = reasonable, *** = good, **** = excellent.

Principles for Best Practice in Clinical Audit.

By NHS, National Institute for Clinical Excellence, CHI (Commission for Health Improvement), Royal College of Nursing, University of Leicester. (Pp 196, paperback plus CD ROM; £19.95 for NHS staff and organisations, £29.95 for those not working for the NHS.) Radcliffe Medical Press, 2002. ISBN 1-85775-976-1. ****

This book is compiled by multiple authors from the disciplines of nursing, information technology, general practice, and audit and its preparation has been funded by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence. The first section covers preparing for audit including details on sources of information, priorities for assessment, the purposes of audit and funding sources, as well as the skills needed for such projects. Subsequent chapters discuss selecting criteria for audit and how performance can be measured. The final chapters detail how audit can be used to make improvements and lead to sustained change. Each section is well referenced. Finally, there is a detailed glossary of audit terms, on-line references, further reading lists, as well as examples of current audit projects.

The text is well written with its main strength being to describe a practical approach to the design and conduct of audit. The understanding of concepts is facilitated by a structured approach, a summary section of key points at the start of each chapter and

many illustrative examples from clinical practice. The book will be of great interest and relevance to all professionals in the health service who are involved in the clinical audit process. The book is value for money for staff working in the NHS at £19.95.

A R Hart

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A Guide to Medical Publishing and Writing.

Edited by Peter Richardson. (Pp 145; £10.99.) Quay Books, 2002. ISBN 1-85642-222-4. ***

This is a 14 author, 15 chapter booklet containing a collection of pieces on electronic and paper writing and publishing. It was heartening for the reviewer to learn that early morning is the most productive time for creativity, as this review was written in the bright calm hours after a midsummer dawn.

The quality of the different chapters is variable. Those dealing with writing CVs, review articles, original research, and the use of the internet were helpful and thought provoking. Conversely the 20 pages on creation of a multimedia CD ROM were turgid and made the reader feel vaguely suicidal.

There was some discussion of the relative places of paper and electronic publishing and it is really hard to estimate the shape of the future. One suspects that the satisfying material presence of a glossy journal or hardback book will always have more appeal than endless scrolling through computer screens.

Friends of the English language will be dispirited by the first sentence of the book "Information is one commodity health professionals are not short of", but thankfully the grammar thereafter is reasonable. Some contributors adopt a jovial approach "Remember to always delete split infinitives" and "Avoid cliches like the plague". Regrettably

neither of these statements is original or particularly helpful.

It is always in the nature of synoptic texts that the reader is left wanting more, but at least this little publication does point in some useful directions.

M C Bateson

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Atrial Fibrillation in Practice.

By Gregory Y H Lip. (Pp 68; £14.95.) Royal Society of Medicine Press, 2002. ISBN 1-85315-484-9. ****

This monograph published by the Royal Society of Medicine is an excellent overview of the most common cardiac arrhythmia, namely atrial fibrillation. This is a very readable book and also enables the busy clinician to scan the text with highlighted boxes relating to the important points. It is up-to-date with discussion on some of the latest treatments of atrial fibrillation with the MAZE operation and newer radiofrequency approaches to the treatment of this disorder. Perhaps it would have been desirable to have seen some of the recent electrophysiological trial results but I am sure this has been delayed in publication.

The role of anticoagulation and antithrombotic approaches in atrial fibrillation is excellently discussed and highlighted with clear didactic guidelines to the practitioner.

The medical management of atrial fibrillation is clearly and concisely discussed and the role of digoxin in taking a "backseat" in this condition is emphasised.

I found this an authoritative, easy to read overview of the condition and would highly recommend it to both cardiologists and general physicians as every practitioner must be exposed to patients with atrial fibrillation. It is slim and flexible so can fit into any pocket to be referred to in a moment or read at any spare instance.

D J Coltart

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