BOOK REVIEWS

PACES for the MRCP.

It is only to be predicted that a single author, especially a specialist registrar, would fail in an attempt to produce a book that would successfully cover the whole of medicine. It could also be predicted that a generalist would fail to provide appropriate balance when paraphrasing the essence of each specialty (a task much more difficult than providing exhaustive comprehensive accounts which omit nothing). This book disproves both predictions.

The book deals in turn with the five stations of PACES. Station 4 (communication skills and ethics) is particularly helpful as there are many suggested gambits which would be helpful in real medical life.

On one level this is a general medical textbook appropriate for MRCP level clinicians. Definitive summaries of medical conditions, their physiology and investigations are clearly laid out. Data overload occasioned by the onslaught of medical conventional wisdom is a continual risk in such books, but the author provides occasional very wisely comments that refresh the mind—for example the internal capsule has a disappointing blood supply. On another level PACES questions are posed throughout, which ensures that it cannot be read passively in the hope that some bits will be remembered: active transport of knowledge rather than osmosis is thereby encouraged. Useful tips are scattered throughout the text. The further reading references at the end of each chapter are appropriate and include some in 2002. Finally, the index is such that this book could be used as a quick reference about subjects about which one was less than knowledgeable.

This book is remarkable. At least one specialist registrar worked harder than contracted! I rarely write such good reviews, especially when I am envious of the breadth of knowledge and energy that must have been required to write this book.

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Declaration of interest: I am a PACES examiner.

ABC of Learning and Teaching in Medicine.


This is an attractively presented short introductory text for medical educators. Sixteen authors produced 14 chapters on a variety of topics relating to the philosophy of adult learning, techniques of acquiring skills and knowledge, and the assessment of results. A rather erratic chapter order probably reflects the fact that the book originated as a series of BMJ articles.

The most helpful chapters are the first one applying educational theory to medical teaching, and the last on creating relevant teaching materials. The middle section on large group, small group, individual, and clinical teaching is also effective. A future edition might with benefit benefit include more material on how adults learn and how individual teachers may achieve maximum effectiveness.

The emphasis is heavily on student contribution rather than lecturing methods with the majority of the talk time. There are valuable insights into satisfactory techniques. It is humbling to think that the objective structured clinical examination (OSCE) was introduced 30 years ago, since its UK introduction has been relatively recent. There is appropriate reticence about the impact of web based learning, conjuring up the image of an unhappy isolated anorak clad student who is trying to compensate for a lack of interpersonal skills.

Drawbacks are predictable. Ideas in education are ephemeral, and some of the concepts presented are outdated; why on earth should ideas in education be outdated? Perhaps it is not totally comprehensive, sometimes hinting that the authors do not subscribe to it? Another quite useful concept is PQRS assessment which emphasises the role of praise before questioning students how they might improve reviewing progress, and summarising the exercise. Similarly the relaxing concept of the doughnut tutorial is not discussed. Does this mean it is obsolete? It is not discussed. Does this mean it is obsolete? Another quite useful concept is PQRS assessment which emphasises the role of Praise before questioning students how they might improve reviewing progress, and summarising the exercise. Similarly the relaxing concept of the doughnut tutorial is not specifically mentioned. Students prepare materials and present to each other, and the educator's role is merely to provide refreshment and referee the debate.

The overall impression is favourable. This is not totally comprehensive, sometimes hindered by technical language, and not always the cutting edge of educational practice, but in general a useful text.

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ABC of Learning and Teaching in Medicine.

100 Grey Cases in Paediatrics.


Although wading through examination questions is a tedious and often superficial learning method, this book is a useful resource for pre-exam practice. The “grey case” type of question comprises of a fairly wordy clinical case description, together with a range of investigation results, is followed by a list. The candidate must choose the best one or more (as defined by the question) for the most appropriate further investigation or treatment. Many paediatric postgraduate trainers are unfamiliar with this method of assessment, although many undergraduate medical schools are moving to a similar format but usually using more abbreviated summaries to describe the clinical scenarios. Questions like this are not easy to construct without falling into the trap of cueing the answer to one question when a subsequent question is asked on the same case. The...
Cardiology Core Curriculum—A Problem-based Approach.


At 596 pages, this new textbook neither fits into a white coat pocket, nor possesses encyclopaedic exhaustiveness. Nevertheless, the chapter structure of text followed by clinical case based questions promotes immediate revision of new learning for the student, and criterion based self assessment for the more advanced trainee. The authors are all American; for the British trainee, the approach to clinical decision making whereby most investigations are performed to exclude unlikely diagnoses, not to confirm clinical judgment, will be unfamiliar though perhaps challenging. The chapter dealing with history and examination paradoxically discusses investigations at length, even though later chapters are dedicated to such investigations.

The paragraphs are usually long, and much information buried in text could have been presented diagrammatically. The referencing of didactic pronouncements, such as percentage point specific risks of cardiac complications of non-cardiac surgery, is patchy.

Discussion of risk factors for coronary artery disease excludes any mention of homocysteine, low birth weight, or socio-economic factors. Risk assessment of the acute coronary syndromes excludes some of the newer biomarkers—for example, C-reactive protein and soluble CD-40 ligand. Similarly, the chapters dealing with arrhythmia management do not reflect recent literature clarifying the indications for implantable cardioverter/defibrillator therapy, or focal pulmonary vein ablation for atrial fibrillation. The role of device based cardiac resynchronisation therapy for heart failure is not discussed, neither the concept of diastolic ventricular interaction.

In contrast, the chapter dealing with pulmonary embolism and pulmonary hypertension presents elegant decision making algorithms and is admirably concise.

Discussion of cardiovascular pharmacology is entirely case based. A strategy based on the statement “If it is difficult to decide whether a ‘wide-complex’ tachycardia is VT or SVT with aberrancy, then procainamide is an appropriate antiarrhythmic to consider using” is not one that I would recommend to the target audience for this textbook in the UK. There is no discussion of low molecular weight heparin versus unfractionated.

In summary, this textbook lacks coverage of the scientific context of some “bread and butter” management dilemmas relevant to district general hospital practice, but does contain detailed equations for calculating regurgitant volumes, stenotic gradients, and transvascular resistance by echo or catheter techniques.

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