

Reviews of Books, Software, and Audiovisual Materials

Common Problems in Pain Management. Theresa Ferrer-Brechner (ed). Yearbook Medical Publishers, Inc, Chicago, 1990, 326 pp, \$59.00.

This book is a review of common problems in pain management. Although some of the topics are somewhat specialized, particularly in the area of dental pain, the pain problems chosen are relevant for primary care physicians.

The book is very readable and is organized into a series of problems. Each of the problem chapters is introduced by a brief case study, then appropriate theory is covered, followed by a literature review, an analysis of the problem, and the recommendations for management. The text is very readable, with technical jargon kept to a minimum, and a remarkably uniform style for a multi-author text, indicating significant editorial control. Illustrations are relatively limited, and judicious use of tables is a worthwhile addition to the text. The text is introduced by two basic chapters on the evaluation of chronic pain and basic psychosocial considerations in the treatment of chronic pain. The topics covered include head and neck pain; upper extremity pain; chest, abdominal, and back pain; and lower extremity pain; there is a sizable section on cancer pain management and a relatively brief section on psychological issues, including work-related injuries. The book is well balanced and covers most of the current, clinically relevant theory in the management of chronic pain. Although the role of behavioral nonpharmacological management is emphasized throughout the book, it could probably have received more prominence, particularly for the primary care physician. Issues involved in cancer pain management are treated particularly well, and use as their basis the World Health Or-

ganization's staged approach to palliative care.

The text is organized into relatively self-contained, short chapters, and it is easy to read on an episodic basis. This text is suitable for primary care physicians, particularly those with an interest in palliative care and many of the common pain syndromes. It would be a useful introductory text for those developing a specialized interest in pain management, both in anesthesiology and in psychiatry and neurosurgery. The approach is balanced and critical, and references are up to date. I highly recommend this book for primary care physicians, residents, and as an introductory text to the subspecialties associated with pain management.

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Drug Evaluations (DE) Subscription. Donald R. Bennett (editor-in-chief). Department of Drugs, Division of Drugs and Toxicology, American Medical Association, Chicago, 1990, \$116.00 for AMA members and \$145.00 for nonmembers.

Now in its third decade of use, *Drug Evaluations* has not changed its original goal "to provide physicians and other health care professionals with up-to-date, unbiased, practical information on the clinical use of drugs." The publication's format, however, has changed. Information is now provided in an 88-chapter, loose-leaf, three-volume set of books with a quarterly updated subscription. As in the past, chapters have been prepared by the professional staff of the Department of Drugs of the American Medical Association and reviewed by members of the American Society for Clinical Pharmacology and Therapeutics. More

than 600 consultants have contributed to the final product.

Advantages of the new subscription format include the addition of 75 new drugs approved by the FDA and numerous investigational drugs and uses that have appeared since publication of the 6th edition. The format also provides a cross-referenced index, which saves the reader time in locating information. Each chapter begins with a review of important diseases and clinical problem areas and often includes tables of comparative product information. For example, in the chapter concerning decongestant, cough, and cold preparations, a 4-page table includes trade-name products and manufacturers, as well as information concerning the decongestant, antihistamine, and analgesic ingredients and amounts. Commercial products may be quickly compared by the reader when selecting a product for an individual patient. Following this review information, each chapter includes individual drug monographs. For example, common adrenergic and anticholinergic agents as well as topical corticosteroids and antitussives are described in the same chapter. Each monograph is listed by its generic name and includes one or more common trade-name products, a brief description of its use along with common side effects, and the usual dosage form and regimens for adults and children.

The writing style of the subscription is remarkably similar to that of earlier editions. The subscription format, however, includes numerous additions and revisions. A practical approach to clinical pharmacology and therapeutics is provided along with chemical structures of commonly prescribed medications. This format also allows for the necessary revisions for a text of its type, pro-

viding a reference that can be updated 4 times a year, instead of the usual once in 2 to 4 years.

Students in practice areas as well as experienced clinicians will find this text a useful tool. It should certainly be included among the references in the libraries of residency programs departments and large group practices. Considering its cost, individuals should consider the daily use of a text of this type and compare it with other commonly used references.

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Research Methods for General Practitioners (Oxford General Practice Series 16). David Armstrong, Michael Calnan, John Grace. Oxford, New York, 1990, 194 pp, \$32.50 (paperback). ISBN 0-19-261822-9.

This book is volume 16 in the Oxford General Practitioner Series, a series that over the years has covered such varied topics as pediatrics, obstetrics, geriatrics, terminal care, women's issues, and health care for Asians, among others. This particular volume represents a genre that I had not seen for quite some time: a how-to-do-it book for "general practitioners" who are interested in "doing research."

The first two authors are sociologists, the third a practicing physi-

cian; all are Brits from the London area. The chapters have predictable titles covering the process of research: Asking Questions, Designing a Research Project, Measuring Things, Collecting Data, In the Field, Data into Numbers, Analysing (sic) Data, Using Statistics, and Writing Up the Research. The tenth and last chapter offers a sort of reprise by discussing in more detail the construction of a research protocol.

The text is well written in characteristic British style: excellent information spiced with dry wit to keep the reader attentive. Many chapters effectively use detailed hypothetical case studies that illustrate key points (the research adventures of Drs Warmhands, Tipps, and Slim, to highlight just three). The information conveyed is accurate, albeit necessarily superficial given the scope of the field and the limitation of an under-200-page book. On the whole, the interested reader will enjoy reading it.

Therein lies the rub. Who are likely to be the interested readers? I believe that most in the United States have given up on the idea of individual practitioners designing and implementing substantial research projects on their own. Time and money present the two most obvious limits, but lack of experience and lack of collaborators also impose barriers. Networks of practicing physicians held together by a central research infrastructure, usually based

in a university, seem to be the developing norm in the US environment. Thus, this book, unabashedly recommending independent research conducted by individuals who begin the process as complete novices, seems oddly off-target for the research environment on this side of the Atlantic. The practitioner with no research training or experience is not likely to be able to follow the instructions in this book and end up proficient in research. There are many 2-year research-oriented fellowship programs in this country that hope their graduates have entry-level skills appropriate for junior faculty positions working with experienced mentors.

In summary, although the quality of the material is high and the writing excellent, I am unsure of the book's audience in this country. Beginning researchers may find it inspirational, but are likely to be disappointed if they attempt to implement the research recipes on their own. Experienced researchers will find the book enjoyable reading, but of insufficient depth to merit placement on the reference shelf. My guess is that the most effective use of this book in the United States will be by experienced researchers using it to train practitioners who have joined a practice-based research network.

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