

## Reviews of Books and Software

*The Medical Book of Lists: A Primer of Differential Diagnosis in Internal Medicine.* Norton J. Greengerber, Scott Coonrod, Curtis Kauer, and Michael Lawson. Mosby-Year Book, Inc, St. Louis, Missouri, 1994, 335 pp, \$24.95. ISBN 0-8151-3437-1.

*The Medical Book of Lists* (4th edition) is required reading for today's harried physician accustomed to our top-10 oriented medical world. This book is a self-described primer of differential diagnosis in internal medicine. This edition has been revised extensively and includes a chapter on AIDS. It contains 315 lists, ranging from descriptions of types of innocent murmurs to descriptions of cancers associated with HIV infection. Chapters are arranged by either organ system or infectious disease. The index is well organized and cross-referenced.

*The Medical Book of Lists* is well written in that the lists contain the complete differential diagnosis of a medical problem or condition. Some lists even contain criteria for making the specific diagnosis (eg, Jones criteria in rheumatic fever) as well as clinical features of tough-to-diagnose illnesses (eg, clinical features of Legionella infection). Most of the lists are referenced from sources that are easy to obtain and read in depth.

Reading *The Medical Book of Lists*, however, returned me to my residency training days years ago. One was comforted by knowing the top 10 causes of a split-second heart sound and smug in the knowledge of the 21 causes of mitral regurgitation. A few years later, and up to my stethoscope in primary care problems, I find this book lacking in certain respects. Undifferentiated symptoms are not included. For example, where is the list describing the 20 causes of vomiting or the list describing the many causes of pelvic pain? It is obvious that this book was written for the internal medicine specialist or house officer in a tertiary care setting. This primer could be improved greatly by the inclusion of lists describing the differ-

ential diagnosis of undifferentiated symptoms or problems that primary care specialists treat in ambulatory settings. From my perspective, these features would be the number one reason to purchase this book.

If you are inclined to impress your friends, and even more importantly your attending, with the top-10 causes of a whole host of medical problems, this easy-to-read, paperback, pocket-size primer is a must purchase. Physicians will find speedy relief of medical heartburn and the occasional stomach discomfort relating to formulating a differential diagnosis by using *The Medical Book of Lists*, 4th edition.

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*Disease-Mongers, How Doctors, Drug Companies and Insurers Are Making You Feel Sick.* Lynn Payer. John Wiley & Sons, Inc, New York, NY, 1992, 260 pp, \$12.95. ISBN 0-471-00737-4.

In her second book, *Disease-Mongers*, Lynn Payer takes a critical look at aspects of the medical establishment. The author depicts how physicians, pharmaceutical companies, and insurers are motivated to make individuals feel sick. The book is well written and organized for easy reading and understanding.

The author reviews the epidemiological data (or lack of data) to support some common health recommendations and practices. For example, current breast cancer screening advice for women under age 50 is to receive a physical examination and a mammogram every 2 years even though there is no research to show that mammograms are helpful screening tools for women in this age group. Nonetheless, physicians support the recommendation and manufacturers promote their mammogram machines as profit-making ventures. The author then makes a simple

observation: "Maybe we are doing a lot of mammograms on a lot of young women for minimal or no benefit." The author argues that women should at least be aware of the available data in order to make an informed choice.

The author critiques several other controversial aspects of medical practice, including chronic fatigue syndrome, postmenopausal hormone therapy, Lyme disease, cardiac risk factors and true outcome measures, and mitral valve prolapse.

She also points out that many physicians order tests without understanding how to interpret the results. Several diseases are overdiagnosed without a true understanding of the impact on individuals and society. Drug companies financially support and market research results that support their products but frequently suppress counter findings. Manufacturers encourage the use of their machines for preventive medicine purposes, but they rarely discuss accuracy and cost. Insurance companies are motivated to insure only healthy individuals.

The book concludes with two major points: first, that more primary care research is needed to better understand some of these basic problems, and second, that each individual should find a good, listening, primary care physician so that the patient and the doctor can discuss options and make the best choice when ordering a test or considering treatment options.

Although the book emphasizes research that is counter to current medical practice, the critical comments are well grounded. The author does an excellent job of organizing available facts so that they are easily understandable even for consumers. All physicians should read this book and then critically evaluate their own medical practices.

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