

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Instructions for Geriatric Patients.** William A. Sodeman, Jr. W.B. Saunders Company, Philadelphia, Pa, 1995, 340 pp, \$39.45. ISBN 0-72164-335-3.

This is one of two books I am aware of that is available specifically for geriatric patient instruction and education. The other is the *Geriatric Patient Education Resources Manual* published in 1991, which costs considerably more at \$247. A computer search by a local medical bookstore did not come up with any other titles in this area.

The instructions are well written in plain language, are supplemented with some useful diagrams and charts, and should be easily understood by patients. Some topics are written specifically for caregivers.

The large type is easy for older patients to read. Photocopying of complete pages (with the copyright notice) for instructional use is allowed by the publisher. There are also 43 pages of diets that are printed in smaller type; there is no table, however, listing the different diets and no index in the book to help the reader.

This book covers a majority of the important topics in geriatrics. Some topics that are missing include dehydration, pain control, long-term care issues, peripheral vascular diseases, alcohol use, smoking cessation, cancer screening, exercise, and other preventive measures.

I agree with the publisher and author that patients and caregivers will find these instruction sheets helpful and reassuring. The book will make our job easier, too.

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**Clinical Hypertension (7th Edition).** Norman M. Kaplan. Williams & Wilkins Company, Baltimore, Md, 1998, 444 pp, \$79.00. ISBN 0683-30132-2.

Unlike a typical medical textbook, *Clinical Hypertension* is the work of a single author. Since 1973, Kaplan has worked to keep up with the burgeoning hypertension literature and distill it quadrennially into a new edition of a text which, he admits, has become the major focus of his professional life. The book is profusely illustrated with tables and figures, many from the original research literature. It is geared toward the clinician who wants to know more about recent developments in hypertension than can be found in review articles, book chapters, or consensus documents such as the *Sixth Report of the Joint National Committee on Prevention, Detection, Evaluation, and Treatment of High Blood Pressure (JNC VI)*.

More than half of the book deals with the pathogenesis, natural history, evaluation, and treatment of primary (essential) hypertension. The detailed chapter on pathogenesis is a readable reference for anyone seeking to understand the latest theories. Kaplan considers sodium intake a significant cause of essential hypertension. The increased prevalence of hypertension in African Americans is attributed to environmental more than genetic influences, since non-urbanized African populations generally have low rates of hypertension.

The book devotes an entire chapter to nonpharmacologic treatments, including a useful review of the evidence regarding diet and exercise. In discussing drug therapy, Kaplan uses evidence-based medicine approaches, such as a number-needed-to-treat analysis, to weight the benefits of drug treat-

ment in different risk groups. Properties of the various agents are described in depth. For first-line drug therapy, Kaplan concurs with *JNC VI* recommendations to use diuretics or beta-blockers unless concomitant conditions (which are well described) indicate another agent. He stresses that if the first drug does not satisfactorily control mild to moderate high blood pressure, substitution of a different drug is preferable to the traditional stepped-care addition approach. Facing the controversy over calcium channel blockers, he concludes that long-acting forms, at least with current knowledge, appear safe, while the short-acting forms should be avoided. A clear and sensible chapter on hypertensive crises discusses the work-up and treatment of hypertensive urgencies and emergencies.

The rest of the book deals with secondary hypertension and special situations such as childhood hypertension, hypertension in pregnancy, and women using birth control pills or hormone replacement therapy. There is a helpful diagram for the work-up of renovascular hypertension.

This is a useful reference for the evidence-based family physician. Each chapter ends with concise conclusions that allow the busy clinician to locate the bottom line. One of the few drawbacks of the book is that the print is quite small. A little eyestrain, however, is a small price to pay for the wisdom, completeness, and consistency of tone which this book offers.

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***The Tao of Immunology: A Revolutionary New Understanding of Our Body's Defenses.*** Marc Lappe. Plenum Publishing Company, New York, NY, 1997, 317 pp, \$27.95. ISBN 0-306-45626-5.

*The Tao of Immunology* is a comprehensive textbook about the body's immune system and related forces in the body.

The book is divided into 16 chapters of approximately 10 to 15 pages each, beginning with the basics of immunology and transitioning into more complex aspects of the body and its immune system. In addition, the author incorporates relevant subject matter such as chemicals that poison the immune system, cancer, ultraviolet light, and HIV. Finally, natural immunity and vaccines are united in the concept of "Tao and the Immune System."

The chapters in *The Tao of Immunology* are easy-to-read and organized. Chapter references, tables, and figures provide the foundation needed to grasp the author's approach to understanding the body's immune system. However, the author's approach may be too simplified for a reader with a medical background.

This is a well-written and well-organized book. Lappe uses a writing style that facilitates the understanding of a complex subject. It may be particularly useful for an undergraduate or graduate student learning about the body's immune system, especially if the student's background is not medical. This edition is reasonably priced for the student as well.

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***Pacific Aquarium: A Relaxation and Entertainment Video.*** Reel Time Video, 8900 Viscount, #184, El Paso, TX 79925.

The potential calming, hypnotic, and therapeutic effects of watching fish and water are well known. This

video aims to "calm the mind and open the soul with its awe-inspiring beauty." The producers claim the video is "set against an inspirational musical soundscape." Viewers float along a coral reef, with the music in the background. Some viewers may be familiar with specific species, but this video offers no clue about what is actually being seen. I have seen advertisements for other aquarium videos, and many of those offer the chance to identify and understand flora and fauna.

Unfortunately, the video fails to deliver the promised "new level of relaxation." The editing is sloppy. The elevator-style music becomes annoying. Rather than an illusion of drifting through an unthreatening world of harmless, peaceful creatures, viewers see harsh camera shadows, and less-than-reassuring glimpses of scuba divers and sharks commingling. I found that I wanted to create a plot line, build to a climax, and fight the sharks. I suspect that if a physician were to use this video in a preoperative waiting area, patients would ask to have the channel changed.

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## ■ SOFTWARE REVIEW

***DynaMed.*** P\SL Consulting Group, Inc.

PRICE: Currently free, subject to change

DOCUMENTATION: Information available on-line

HOW SUPPLIED: On the Internet at <http://www.dynamicmedical.com>

HARDWARE/SOFTWARE REQUIREMENTS: PC or Macintosh with World Wide Web access and a browser

CUSTOMER SUPPORT & INFORMATION: E-mail: [info@dynamicmedical.com](mailto:info@dynamicmedical.com)

RATING: Marginal, as of the time of this review

I have yet to catch the World Wide Web bug that has infected my son and

many of my engineering friends, despite several intentional exposures. But because so many people seem blissfully consumed by this bug, I keep experimenting so that I may get a pleasant case of it myself.

With that in mind, I volunteered to take a look at DynaMed ([www.dynamicmedical.com](http://www.dynamicmedical.com)), a Web site that is "dedicated to providing the information and information services most likely to help promote the informed and appropriate use of medicine by health care professionals and organizations as well as by the people to whom they are prescribed." The authors admit that their site is a work in progress, but they felt it was mature enough for review.

DynaMed can be reached with any web browser. (I did my review using Microsoft Internet Explorer.) Their home page lists links for "What's New," "Mission," "Sponsors," "Warning!," "Search," and "Site Map." The search page is where users will spend most of their time, but the other areas give some useful information about the site. The list of sponsors was 43 organizations long when I visited—all of them drug companies. DynaMed's mission statement is lofty, and maybe someday their content will allow them to have pages for the various aspects of that mission. Right now, however, the most useful feature was the search engine, accessed via the Search button. DynaMed's main screen is illustrated in Figure 1. Figure 2 illustrates some of DynaMed's medical content.

DynaMed interfaces with four search engines (Excite, Infoseek, McKinley, and Alta Vista) and The Doctor's Guide, a doctor's news and conference search tool. I decided to search a topic a patient had asked about that day: smoking cessation. Each of the search engines displays its hits according to perceived relevance. Some of the hits were clearly important articles or Web sites, but all of the search engines had some pretty weak offerings in the top ten.

I suppose that with practice, I would become savvy enough to find



FIGURE 1

The main screen of DynaMed

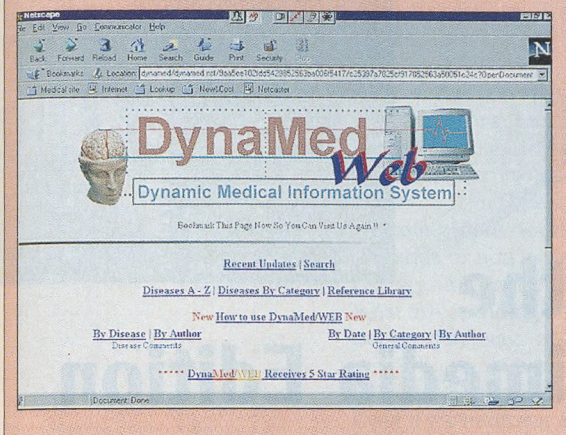
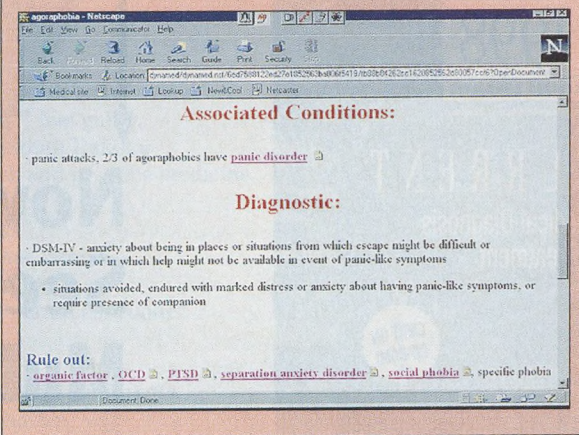


FIGURE 2

An example of DynaMed's information on agoraphobia.



appropriate research on the Web in a reasonable length of time. However, I have found better materials for smoking cessation elsewhere, and I did not find the electronic method any more advantageous than keeping the best materials in a file.

The Doctor's Guide is used to find out what is new or where there might be a conference or Web site on a topic. I decided to challenge DynaMed to come up with family practice continuing education conferences, which I like to research each year when I have to commit

my scarce CME dollars on a single out-of-town conference. Despite several queries of topics I have been considering, I did not get a single hit on a conference sponsored by either the American Academy of Family Physicians or the Society of Teachers of Family Medicine. This was a big disappointment.

The home page is laid out neatly and is easy to use. The only glitch I found in navigating the site involved the links at the bottom of each page that are supposed to

return you to the DynaMed home page. Each time I tried to use one, it crashed my system. I assume this problem will be addressed as the program matures.

Despite spending several hours immersing myself in DynaMed, I still have not caught the Web bug. If you already like the Web, though, it might well be a site worth checking out. And, at least for now, the price is right: free!

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