



BOOK REVIEWS

Conn's Current Therapy 1998.

Robert E. Rakel, MD. W.B. Saunders Company, Philadelphia, Pa, 1998, 1360 pp. ISBN 0-7216-7223-X, \$59.00.

This year *Conn's Current Therapy* celebrates its 50th anniversary of providing a well-written text composed of up-to-date and succinct reviews of many common problems encountered by the practicing physician. Most of the nearly 300 chapters are original works created by world-renowned experts for this year's edition. The book covers a broad range of topics from such common entities as hiccups, sleep apnea, atrial fibrillation, and acute pancreatitis to more esoteric disease states such as rat-bite fever, porphyria, snake-bite poisoning, and even the plague.

The text is organized by body system and then subdivided into chapters, each dealing with a different problem. The organization of each chapter varies depending on the author. Most authors do an excellent job of presenting an overview of the topic and then explaining treatment modalities and potential complications. Since all of the chapters are current, specific treatment regimens and prevention strategies are often directly applicable to patient care. In particular, medication selection and appropriate dosing may be helpful to the practicing physician.

One of the strengths of this text is its coverage of specific care issues, as well as disease states. For example, there are individual chapters dedicated to care after myocardial infarction, during the antepartum period, and of the high-risk neonate. In addition, this book includes a detailed list of common laboratory normal values and a table of medications approved by the Food and Drug Administration in 1996.

One of the dangers of a text written by experts is that the recommen-

dations provided tend to be based more on opinion and less on reviews of current evidence-based studies. However, many of the authors in this text cited recent studies to support their recommendations. Also, since the organization of each chapter is author dependent, another potential drawback to this text is that extracting specific information, such as first-line medications and appropriate dosing, may be more time-intensive than in other texts.

The 3- to 15-page topic reviews make this an excellent desktop review for the busy physician. This book could be complemented with a standard specialty text that provides a more comprehensive approach to the topics. In addition, a critical review of the current literature is essential to maintain an understanding of treatment options and to determine which ones are derived from an evidence-based approach. In lieu of these, resources, however, *Conn's Current Therapy* serves well as a readily accessible composite of current reviews. This text provides the busy practitioner with a curbside consultation from a well-respected authority without ever having to leave the office.

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Comprehensive Adolescent Health Care, Second Edition.

Stanford B. Friedman, Martin Fisher, S. Kenneth Schonberg, and Elizabeth M. Alderman, eds. Mosby-Year Book, Inc, St Louis, Mo, 1998. 1349 pp. ISBN 0-8151-3386-3. \$150.

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Comprehensive Adolescent Health Care offers an accessible approach to the overall health care of teen-aged patients. This book provides up-to-date, well-organized information on disorders common in adolescents, such as urinary tract infection and headache. It also features excellent coverage of serious medical problems, such as lupus, sickle cell disease, and leukemia. Abnormalities such as proteinuria and hematuria are discussed in conveniently short chapters that help guide initial evaluation. A chapter on laboratory testing in adolescents offers advice on selecting tests for screening or for special situations, and highlights laboratory values that may differ from adult or childhood norms.

This book provides frank discussions of subjects not often addressed elsewhere, including the legal and financial concerns that arise because of teen-agers' inconsistent compliance with medical care. While such topics as school failure and learning disorders are expected in the section on education, issues surrounding "gifted" teen-agers, school-based health care, psychoeducational testing, and recommended reading for adolescents are also discussed. Practical tips for dealing with teen-agers are provided. Many of these tips could be helpful when counseling parents, including ways to handle allowances, chores, and curfews.

Psychosocial issues receive considerable attention. Whole chapters are devoted to such diverse topics as divorce, family illness, foster care, the media, the military, cults, and adolescents with gay or lesbian parents. Risk behaviors are addressed, and sexuality, substance abuse, running away, delinquency, and violence are discussed in detail. These sections are well balanced, and excellent references suggest further reading on these topics. Likewise, interesting philosophical concerns are raised in

the chapter describing the evolution of adolescent behavior and in discussions of the history of adolescence and cross-cultural views of adolescence.

There is much new material in this second edition of *Comprehensive Adolescent Health Care*, including chapters on psychiatric problems and medical emergencies prevalent in adolescents. Problems that are difficult to manage, including enuresis, chronic abdominal pain, and chronic fatigue syndrome, are insightfully examined. The text highlights important issues in ophthalmology and otolaryngology, along with surgical conditions often encountered in teen-agers. Orthopedics and sports medicine are well covered, and a dentistry chapter includes useful information on orthodontics, dental trauma, and the effects of bulimia.

Excellent writing and editing have made unusually smooth transitions between chapters for a text of this size. Finding information quickly on a topic of interest is also easy, making this reference book quite useful for clinical practice. Well-designed figures and tables add to the text by providing differential diagnoses and algorithms for evaluation of complex problems. Color plates enhance the descriptions of dermatologic and gynecologic disorders.

Comprehensive Adolescent Health Care is a definitive guide to state-of-the-art health care for teenagers. This essential resource is an important addition to the family physician's library, and it is highly recommended for anyone providing primary care or mental health services to adolescent patients.

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Practical Ambulatory Geriatrics, Second Edition. Thomas T. Yoshikawa, Elizabeth L. Cobbs, and Kenneth Brummel-Smith. St Louis, Mo, Mosby Times-Mirror, 1998. ISBN 0-8151-2449-X, 528 pp. \$39.95.

Practical Ambulatory Geriatrics is a complete, current, well-formatted textbook on the subject. The book has 4 main sections, each covering a major area of geriatric care essential for the family physician. Every chapter begins with key points that highlight the information in that section and alert the reader to the important facts in the body of text.

In Part 1, Principles of Ambulatory Geriatric Care, the authors cover basic subjects that may not be found in typical textbooks. This includes information on office setup, the first office visit, prescribing guidelines, and other essentials of caring for the older patient. Part 2, Approaches for Assessment, covers topics faced every day in caring for these patients. Easy-to-read topics include preoperative screening, evaluation for automobile driving, and elder abuse, which is a new chapter for this edition. Part 3, Prevention and Health Maintenance, covers important age-specific issues such as dietary recommendations and preventive interventions. Finally, Part 4, Common Geriatric Syndromes and Problems, covers more than 30 important topics. Everyday issues such as hypertension, diabetes, cardiac problems, confusion, and dizziness are included. Helpful tables and pictures, and appropriate recommendations for intervention and treatment are provided.

This edition is thoroughly updated but only includes 2 completely new chapters. It is unclear whether it would be necessary to purchase this edition if you already own the previous one. As a family physician with a large geriatric patient population, I found myself referring to this book on a regular basis during the months that it was on my desk for this review. It was very helpful for quick answers to my questions. This text would be a valuable tool for family physicians and general internists, as well as medical students and residents during a geriatrics rotation.

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■ SOFTWARE REVIEW

Dermatology in Primary Care I and II. Appleton & Lange New Media, Four Stamford Plaza, PO Box 120041, Stamford, CT 06912-0041; (800) 423-1359.

PRICE: \$179 each, \$329 for both.

DOCUMENTATION: 26-page, illustrated, pocket-sized booklet.

HOW SUPPLIED: Two CD-ROM disks.

HARDWARE REQUIREMENTS: 486/66 or better IBM-compatible PC, 8 MB RAM, 256-color VGA monitor, double-speed CD-ROM drive, Soundblaster-compatible sound card, and 8-bit speakers or better.

MOUSE SUPPORT: Yes.

CUSTOMER SUPPORT: Toll-free call and on-screen help.

DEMONSTRATION DISKS: No.

CONTINUING MEDICAL EDUCATION: 20 hours of American Academy of Family Physicians credit.

RATING: Good for novice learners.

Dermatology in Primary Care is a CD-ROM synopsis of basic dermatology. It is easy to install, with user-friendly interfaces. The material has 3 sections: the library, with reference databases; the seminar, with structured material, some in a quiz format; and the clinic, with simulations of patient encounters.

The library has 7 databases that are easily accessed. The book of diseases database is structured like a dermatology textbook and includes information on epidemiology, etiology, history, physical examination findings, and therapy. The Pharmacy database provides 4 categories of information (name, indications, activity, and routes of administration) that users can access for common dermatologic preparations. Skin Lesions is a visual glossary classified into 4 categories: primary, secondary, vascular, and pigmentary. Figure 1 lists the primary lesions contained in the Skin Lesions section. Double-clicking any one of the lesions takes the user to a screen that provides a definition, subcate-

FIGURE 1

A menu of primary skin lesions from the Skin Lesions glossary in *Dermatology in Primary Care's* Library section.

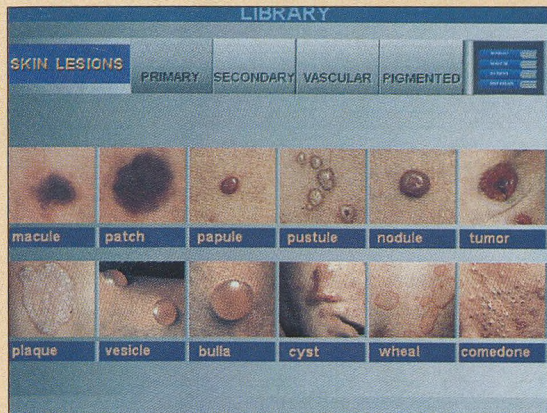


FIGURE 2

Illustration from the Clinics section of *Dermatology in Primary Care*.



gories, a list of associated diseases, and related skin lesions (eg, plaque as a confluence of papules). The Tests section provides brief definitions, photographs, and instructional descriptions for performing 10 dermatologic tests (Auspitz, candle, diascopy, microscopy, patch, pinch, pull, trichogram, Tzanck, and Wood's light). Body Map is a module that shows the typical distribution of common dermatologic diseases. Patient Education contains 21 disease categories, with information that can be individually customized and printed for patient handouts. Differential Diagnosis consists of a graphic of the human body; clicking on a body part produces a list of common conditions that affect that part.

The Seminar category contains subsections regarding the definition, epidemiology, etiology, history, physical presentation, laboratory results, diagnosis, therapy, and prognosis of various diseases. As users progress through a typical seminar, they are either given information, asked questions, or asked to complete assignments, after which correct answers are provided.

The Clinic is a simulation of an office visit. Users are given a brief patient history, shown the skin lesions, and then asked to choose among several different diagnostic

and therapeutic options (Figure 2). After completion of the simulation, feedback is provided regarding the user's choices and the optimal approach to the case.

Using the software program as a reference can be time-consuming and not always profitable. For example, an African American woman presents to the office for evaluation of the hypopigmented lesions that developed on her buttocks after a superficial ulceration healed. When the physician searches in the book of diseases database, he or she will easily find hypopigmentation, with a listing of subcategories, such as albinism, pityriasis alba, postinflammatory, and vitiligo. Upon entering a subcategory, such as postinflammatory, a picture is shown, but only 2 sentences of information are provided. None of the other 6 databases in the library provide additional, relevant information. Turning to the Seminar section, hypopigmentation is easily located because listings are alphabetical; however, the information is still scanty. Going through the various subsections of hypopigmentation such as definition, etiology, degree, mechanism, extent, scaling, and secondary takes approximately 30 minutes, but produces only 10 sentences of information, some of which are repetitive. Although the pictures are interesting, it would have taken less

than 5 minutes to find and read the same information in a textbook.

Despite the time-consuming nature and redundancy of the software program, there are 2 excellent features. These are the hypertext links, (that allow users to easily navigate from an article's text to reference material) and the ability to customize and print patient education handout materials. Another attractive point is the ability to test one's knowledge by working through patient scenarios in both the Seminar and Clinic sections.

While the program is well-designed and the visual graphics are aesthetically appealing and self-explanatory, much of the information is basic and limited, with the exception of the most common disorders, such as psoriasis, which were covered in more detail. A needed but missing feature is the ability to directly search for specific symptoms or physical findings.

Dermatology in Primary Care offers little advantage compared with well-done printed references. Although it is more portable and can be put onto a network information system, the lack of advanced material makes it best suited for novice learners such as medical students.

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