

# Book Reviews

**Bedside Cardiology. Fourth edition.** By Jules Constant. 360 pp., illustrated. Boston, Little, Brown, 1993. \$51.95. ISBN 0-3161-5385-0.

In this era of using technology for diagnosis, it is a hopeful sign that a clinical diagnosis book makes it to its fourth edition, such as Jules Constant's *Bedside Cardiology*. The introduction clearly states that this edition is written for cardiologists and internists with a special interest in cardiology. I think it is safe to say that this book also applies to family physicians with strong interests in cardiology. The word strong is used purposely. This text has a chapter devoted to the stethoscope, 17 pages to the first heart sound, and 27 pages to jugular pressure and pulsations. *Bedside Cardiology* is not light reading for the faint of heart.

The book is written in a style that takes some adjustment time. Rather than being a narrative, the author uses a question-and-answer method. For example, in the second chapter on physical examination, the discussion of findings in infective endocarditis goes something like this: How does infective endocarditis affect the eyes? ANS: a. Conjunctival hemorrhage and petechiae . . . , b. Roth spots (oval hemorrhages . . . ). Although such a style does induce the reader to think about the answers before proceeding, it does take some time to pick up the rhythm of this writing style.

Dr. Constant organized the text in a more conventional manner than he wrote it, however. The book begins with an excellent discussion of using checklists to gather the history, and then proceeds to clues from physical appearance. Then, step by step the reader is led through the examination, from palpating pulses, inspecting the chest, and auscultating the chest to detailed descriptions of the heart sounds. Helpful details accompany these descriptions. In the chapter on ejection murmurs, almost 2 pages are spent describing the humming systolic ejection murmur of childhood. Not only is the physiology carefully described, including an illustration of a phonocardiogram, but the history behind the eponym for this murmur, the Still murmur, is given. Nearly every discussion has a radiograph, diagram, illustration, or photograph to help the reader interpret the text.

Who would find this book most useful? I think any family physician with a strong interest in cardiology or one with an interest in learning every nuance of the cardiac examination would find this text to be a helpful addition to his or her library.

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**Common Skin Disorders. Fourth edition.** By Ernst Epstein. 360 pp., illustrated. Philadelphia, W.B. Saunders, 1994. \$49 (paper). ISBN 0-7216-6751-1.

Despite the common occurrence of dermatological problems in family practice, accurate diagnosis and

treatment remain frequent challenges. Many useful texts of various types are available, but one can still be left with uncertainty about how to approach an atypical or unusual dermatologic problem in an individual patient. In addition, for many common problems there is often a confusing array of controversial treatment approaches that one needs to sort through to arrive at a treatment plan.

*Common Skin Disorders* provides the generalist physician with updated practical help in dealing with dermatologic problems. Now in its fourth edition since its appearance in 1979, this softcover book is authored by a well-known and widely respected practicing dermatologist who has more than 20 years of practice and teaching experience. The book is intended as a practical "how-to" mini-textbook for both physicians and patients.

There are three major sections: (I) Physician's Section, including 43 subjects in 192 pages; (II) Appendices, including a detailed technique for microscopic examination for fungus, sources of dermatological products, and 130 color illustrations of common skin problems; and (III) Patient Education Sheets on 60 subjects that are encountered frequently in primary care.

There are several unique strengths of this book that make it a helpful resource in diagnosis and treatment of common skin disorders. The Physician's Section addresses common problems in a concise and well-organized fashion with emphasis on differential diagnosis and a recommended approach to therapy; where controversy exists, the author gives his rationale for his preferred treatment modality. The chapters on dermatologic surgery and topical therapy techniques are especially good and are filled with practical tips not often mentioned in other dermatology texts.

The color illustrations are well done, often magnified, and in many instances show skin problems in various stages after treatment. Perhaps most unique and useful are the Patient Instruction Sheets on most subjects that the primary care physician is likely to see. These sheets are intended for duplication by physicians for their patients with the publisher's preapproval.

I have found this book to be helpful in every case consulted during a 2-week period in practice. It is a rich source of teaching points relating to diagnosis and therapy with an emphasis on the least scarring and most cost-effective approaches to treatment. The book is well indexed so that quick reference is readily obtained. It is strongly recommended as an important addition to the generalist physician's library and for frequent use of its patient education materials.

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