

## Book Reviews

**Basic Cancer Medicine.** By Maurie Markman. 140 pp. Philadelphia, WB Saunders, 1997. \$35 (paper). ISBN: 0-7216-5824-5.

This short book is intended to provide all generalist physicians caring for cancer patients with a quick reference to the management of malignant disease. The topic is highly relevant to the practice of family medicine. The book is divided into four sections: tumor biology and general principles of therapy (28 pages), information on 36 different types of cancer (72 pages), a miscellaneous section describing unproved therapies and what is on the horizon (9 pages), and a description of various antineoplastic drugs (3 pages). Unfortunately, the considerable amount of white space and numerous blank pages make those numbers misleading. Coverage is extremely abbreviated for most topics, especially antineoplastic drugs, for which insufficient data are given to guide their usage or even to monitor for adverse effects.

Listed at the end of each topic are suggested additional readings, the majority of which are from the *New England Journal of Medicine* or oncology journals, that might have escaped notice by the primary care physician. None is more recent than 1995; an updating would have been useful before the book went to press.

Perhaps the most useful aspects of this book are its quick overview of specific cancer types, including the most common metastatic sites, a staging system, and overall survival rates unique to each cancer. These data would be useful to consult before trying to counsel a patient with newly diagnosed cancer about the expected behavior of their cancer. The shortcomings of the book are its lack of depth in the discussions of treatments and treatment side-effects and its lack of illustrations. When compared with the American Cancer Society *Textbook of Oncology*, ed 2, published in 1995 and distributed to physicians without charge by the American Cancer Society, Markman's book is unable to compete in coverage of most areas reviewed. The different publication dates do not affect the relevance of the information presented. When choosing material for the physician's library, the small amount of additional information added by Markman's text is not sufficient to justify its added expense.

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**Current Diagnosis 9.** Edited by Rex B. Conn, William Z. Borer, and Jack W. Snyder. 1310 pp., illustrated. Philadelphia, WB Saunders, 1996. \$115. ISBN 0-7216-5843-1.

*Current Diagnosis 9* is the ninth edition of a text that has been around for the past 30 years. It is a substantive revision, in that most of the 463 contributors are new, and the number of editors has increased from one to three. There are a total of 203 chapters in 16 sections cover a wide variety of topics.

As stated by the editors in the preface, "*Current Diagnosis* was never intended to be a comprehensive textbook of medicine." Rather, its utility is in "bring[ing] together in concise definitive articles the best available current information on medical diagnosis to assist the physician in arriving at the correct diagnosis as efficiently as possible." Each chapter offers comprehensive information on diagnosis. It specifically does not deal with etiology, epidemiology, pathogenesis, or management. This text is to be used as an adjunct in the library rather than as a stand-alone medicine text.

Even so, *Current Diagnosis 9* is useful. Most chapters are well written and concise, with an emphasis on proper diagnosis. Various diagnostic tools are discussed in each chapter, and the authors give their recommendations as to which methods to use. If you have forgotten the exact timing of cardiac enzyme changes or want a refresher on the latest tests to diagnose systemic lupus erythematosus, this book will have you up to speed quickly and efficiently, even in the middle of a busy practice day. Several chapters offer such subheadings as "Pitfalls in Diagnosis," and "Diagnostic Procedures That Are Not Helpful." I found these discussions particularly useful.

I do have some significant complaints about the text. Of the 463 contributors, only a small handful are family physicians, and the unique perspective of family physicians is not well represented. Some of the authors make statements that suggest a lack of ambulatory care experience, such as when they recommend a Gram stain be done on all patients suspected of having group A  $\beta$ -hemolytic streptococcal pharyngitis or all of these patients should have acute and convalescent antistreptolysin O titers measured. Unfortunately the specialty orientation of the chapters makes many of the suggestions somewhat suspect. None of the chapters is referenced, so it is impossible to follow suggestions back to any sort of research to support them. It is never clear whether the statements are evidence based or simply the result of institutional dogma. Finally, the selection of topics is somewhat arbitrary and not necessarily related to clinical importance. For example, there is a chapter on mumps but not on measles, a chapter on sphingolipidosis but not on metabolic acidosis. I could find out about Marburg virus and Ebola virus but not respiratory syncytial virus.

I used this text for 4 months before writing this review. At times I found it quite helpful, at times it was less so, and sometimes it was not helpful at all, either because the topic I was looking for was not addressed or because the specialty orientation was not useful in my primary care practice (I treat a lot of streptococcal pharyngitis, but I do not measure many acute and convalescent antistreptolysin O titers). Also, the lack of references made me question somewhat many of the suggestions. Given that for \$115 *Current Diagnosis 9*

will be an adjunctive text in a medical library, I am not convinced that the usefulness of this text outweighs its shortcomings.

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**Fundamentals of Clinical Practice: A Textbook on the Patient, Doctor and Society.** Edited by Mark B. Mengel and Warren L. Holleman. 515 pp. New York, Plenum Publishing, 1996. \$59.95. ISBN 0-306-45348-7.

This book would be an excellent addition to community and behavioral medicine curricula in both residency and medical school settings. Several of the authors are well-known teachers and researchers in family medicine. The textbook addresses the patient-physician relationship from a variety of angles. The first section addresses the patient, with chapters on human health and disease and individual and family development; the second section deals with becoming and being a physician in today's challenging health care environment; and the third section describes the numerous contexts of family, community, the workplace, environment, culture, and economics that have an impact on the physician-patient relationship. The remainder of the book is devoted to special issues of health policy and economics, medical ethics, and the current problems of tobacco, alcohol, and drug abuse; violence; mental illness; sexually transmitted diseases; vulnerable and indigent populations; and maternal and child health. Overall, I found the book to be fascinating and well researched.

This book successfully keeps the focus on the patient-physician relationship by inserting case presentations at regular intervals. The chapters are designed with cases and questions for small-group discussion at the end of each chapter.

When I used several of the chapters this past year during our community medicine rotation, the answers to some of the questions accompanying the case presentations did not appear to be straightforward. A facilitator's guide to accompany the cases and questions might be helpful. Additionally, the residents found that discussing cases which might not be applicable to their practice community to be less meaningful. Nevertheless, the cases raised lots of good issues for discussion.

This attempt at covering a broad range of topics is both successful and comprehensive. The book begins by focusing on the physician-patient relationship, adding layer upon layer until we can see in its entirety how complex and diverse practicing medicine can be, particularly in the context of worrisome public health issues. Medical schools and residency programs will find this textbook on the relationship of the patient, physician, and society a welcome resource as they strive to impart the community and public health implications of the physician's role.

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**Manual of Skin Surgery—A Practical Guide to Dermatologic Procedures.** By David J. Leffell and Marc D. Brown. 250 pp., illustrated. New York, Wiley-Liss, 1997. \$45. ISBN: 0-471-13411-2.

This textbook of excisional cutaneous surgery is designed for medical students, residents, and practicing physicians. The text begins with a review of basic principles of anatomy and skin pathophysiology and then focuses on specific procedural skills training for office-based care and procedures. The book contains 13 chapters on diagnosis, practical anatomy, wound healing, skin biopsy, local anesthesia, surgical instruments, wound closure materials, patient preparation, basic excisional surgery, surgical complications, special topics in dermatologic surgery, and risk management. The chapter on special topics helps the practitioner modify general approaches for special circumstances. One appendix includes action guides for skin biopsy, pigmented lesions, basal cell cancer, squamous cell cancer, and complications. These action guides are suggested algorithms in the work-up and treatment strategies. Another appendix includes vendors for dermatologic surgery products.

The book can be understood by learners at any level. The index is detailed and easy to follow. The text uses drawings and color pictures to focus the reader. The drawings are extremely helpful, particularly in the challenging area of the face, where special anatomic consideration is given to recommended planes for elliptical excision. The strategy of the authors, beginning with basic principles of defining the lesion, reviewing the anatomy, and describing normal wound healing, followed by procedural considerations of anesthesia and biopsy, is very effective. Although there is no formal bibliography, there are suggestions for further reading with descriptions of seven other texts. It is important to understand that this text does not relate to skin disease but rather surgical approaches to lesions.

I believe that this reference is useful for the family practice clinic, is an excellent learning guide for family medicine residents, and provides a strong foundation for medical students. Best of all, its relatively low cost should allow even those on a limited budget to include it in a personal library.

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**A Measure of My Days: The Journal of a Country Doctor.** By David Loxterkamp. 321 pp. Hanover, NH, University Press of New England, 1997. \$24.95 (paper). ISBN 0-87451-799-0.

This is an engaging and important book that should take its place next to the classic photo-essay by Berger and Mohr, *A Fortunate Man*, which describes the life of the English country doctor John Sassall (Berger J, Mohr J. A fortunate man. New York: Pantheon Books, 1967). Each provides an intimate look inside the prac-