Book Reviews

The Family Practice Handbook, University of Iowa. *By John E. Littler and Timothy Momany. 716 pp, illustrated. Chicago, Year Book, 1990. $22.50. ISBN 0-8151-8944-3.*

This pocket-sized reference book is to family practice what *The Harriet Lane Handbook* and *The Mont Reid Handbook* are to pediatrics and surgery, respectively. The handbook is written by the residents and edited by the chief residents in family practice at the University of Iowa. It is intended to be a quick reference guide for use by medical students, residents in family practice and other primary care specialties, and practicing physicians. The authors have achieved this goal well.

The book is divided into two sections. Part I contains chapters, in outline and algorithm format, that discuss the common problems in 15 different specialty areas, such as emergency medicine, rheumatology, obstetrics, general surgery, and psychiatry. Each discussion is succinct and provides a "big-picture" look at differential diagnosis, pathophysiology, evaluation, and therapy. The tables, reference data, drug dosages, and illustrations support the text nicely. For example, particularly handy are the pediatric developmental milestone tables, Dubowitz criteria, and SBE prophylaxis charts—those things we never remember or have at our fingertips when we need them.

Part II outlines the procedures that family physicians do in the emergency department, hospital, and office. Each is organized by indications, contraindications, materials, technique, complications, and follow-up. The descriptions are by necessity brief. Each would be strengthened by photographs or more extensive diagrams, but if the authors were to do so, it would no longer be a handbook—it would be an encyclopedia! If the reader uses the discussion of procedures as a pilot uses a "preflight checklist," nothing important will be forgotten, and the physician will feel more comfortable doing the procedure. Examples of the 30 procedures are venous cutdown, culdocentesis, fetal scalp pH sampling, thoracentesis, cryotherapy, and flexible sigmoidoscopy.

Readers will be well-served by this handbook. Medical students and residents will like it because they can carry it with them, they can use it to broaden or narrow their differential diagnoses, and they will find the evaluation and treatment guidelines practical and helpful. The reference data are easily accessed and not overly distilled. Practicing physicians will like it because it can be used during or between patient appointments—it is quick and easy to use, and the content is substantial.

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The Cardiac Rhythms—A Systematic Approach to Interpretation. *By Raymond E. Phillips and Mary K. Feeney. 591 pp, illustrated. Philadelphia, W.B. Saunders, 1990. $28.95 (paper). ISBN 0-7216-2427-8.*

The Cardiac Rhythms is designed as a primer for self-study and frequently uses a workbook format. The authors' objective is to present a method for learning the disorders of the heartbeat from the electrocardiogram (ECG).

Beginning with a basic review of the anatomy and electrophysiology of the heartbeat and the electrocardiogram, the text gives

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significant attention to the normal heartbeat before the more difficult abnormal rhythms are described. The effects of the autonomic nervous system and of cardiac drugs are integrated into the description of each arrhythmia. Multiple clinical sequences are used to demonstrate the variations that can be seen with each rhythm in clinical practice. Emphasis is placed on problem solving, and test electrocardiograms (with the correct answers) are presented to allow readers to evaluate their progress.

This publication is well organized and the text is easily readable, with high-quality printing and profuse illustrations. The latter, along with many appropriate and well-reproduced ECG tracings, should be praised for transmitting a clear message to readers.

The material covered by *The Cardiac Rhythms* will be useful to all family physicians, especially to those who care for patients in the emergency department or in the coronary care unit (CCU). Physicians reviewing for Advanced Cardiac Life Support (ACLS) courses are apt to find the material more complete and more easily understandable than some of that presented in the ACLS manual. The book will be particularly advantageous for family practice residents on their cardiology and CCU rotations. Of significant benefit to the new learner is the stylized pictorial framework and workbook format.

This reviewer believes that the text indeed lives up to the authors' objectives and recommends it favorably.

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