

**Medical Choices/Medical Chances: How Patients, Families, and Physicians Can Cope with Uncertainty.** By Harold J. Bursztajn, Richard I. Feinbloom, Robert M. Hamm, and Archie Brodsky. 54 pp. New York, Routledge, Chapman & Hall, 1990. \$15.95 (paper). ISBN 0-415-90292-4.

This book deals with the often implicit and occasionally unquestioned reductionist approach to patient care that seeks absolute answers to medical problems only in diagnostic tests. Examples of medical tragedies that can result from this single-minded, mechanistic approach are highlighted, and a probabilistic approach is offered as an alternative. It is suggested that the clinician should be cognizant of the constantly changing interactions occurring among the physician, patient, medical intervention, and the healing environment. This engaging book is concerned as much with medical philosophy as with the social commentary on the danger of being too simplistic and uncaring in medicine. The family physician whose outlook is holistic is well acquainted with the message the authors wish to share.

This book would fit nicely into an introductory medical humanities course or on a shelf in the intern's on-call room. The lay public and experienced physician may be a bit put off by the negativeness of the beginning of this book, but hope is present as well. Although this book is not core reading for all family physicians, it does make fulfilling reading for those physicians interested in medical problem solving.

Geoffrey Goldsmith, M.D., M.P.H.  
University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences  
College of Medicine  
Little Rock, AR

**Practical Fluids and Electrolytes.** By John N. Krieger and Donald J. Serrard. 229 pp., illustrated. Norwalk, CT, Appleton & Lange, 1991. \$19.95 (paper). ISBN 0-8385-2621-7.

The authors of this book relate that they have had many years of experience teaching the subject of fluids, electrolytes, and acid-base disorders to second-year medical students, nurses, physicians' assistants, clinical clerks, and their colleagues in practice. Based upon their experience, they developed what they believe is a practical and effective approach to understanding this area of medicine. This book is an attempt to teach the basics and underlying philosophy that the physician should understand to treat major clinical disorders. The book is organized into 13 chapters with four sections: basic renal physiology, normal fluid and electrolyte balance, the most common fluid and electrolyte disorders, and, finally, two important disorders, chronic renal failure and obstructive uropathy. The authors have organized each chapter to outline study questions. They then present a didactic review and sample problems with methods and mechanisms by which calculations can be made. Finally, they review questions and answers with commentary on the answers. They state that each chapter is to be read in 30 to 60 minutes, and the entire book can be read in one or two weekends.

The diagrams are in black and white, and many of the drawings and diagrams are familiar. Some of the material seems more relevant for medical students and interns than for practicing physicians.

This book should be viewed not as a textbook, but as a concise, updated review. Algorithms are used in the last sections of the book when dealing with chronic renal failure and obstructive uropathy. These two areas of the book are welcome additions and have more direct clinical relevance for the clinician than some of the other chapters.

In summary, this book will be of interest to some family physicians but will probably be of wider interest to medical students and house officers.

Ross R. Black II, M.D.  
Cuyahoga Falls, OH

**Textbook of Family Practice. Fourth edition.** Edited by Robert E. Rakel. 1950 pp., illustrated. Philadelphia, W.B. Saunders, 1990. \$125. ISBN 0-7216-3115-0.

The practice of continuing comprehensive primary care requires that family physicians remain current with recent advances in medicine and develop new skills in diagnosis and management. Although they may have many resources from which to gain new clinical knowledge, the 1990 edition of the *Textbook of Family Practice* must be ranked among the best.

This newest edition succeeds in providing for the practicing physician a reliable source of information consolidated in a single text and responsive to those areas of clinical medicine that are most rapidly changing. To do so, the editor has added 33 new chapter titles; 19 were rewritten from the previous edition. Of the 142 contributors, more than one-half are family physicians, thus preserving the book's emphasis on clinical relevance. Examples of chapter topics include an update of immunization recommendations, newborn care, the family's impact on health, dementia, and the ambulatory management of acquired immune deficiency syndrome.

This book is aptly named *Textbook of Family Practice*, because it not only deals with the biological aspects of clinical practice but also includes an orientation to the basics of the family medicine perspective on health care and its delivery. There are new chapters on managed care, risk management, research methodology, and a particularly good section on interpreting the medical literature. All in all, it truly is a textbook, reflecting the diverse elements that make up our discipline.

Despite its imposing size, this book is extremely readable. The text is concise and straightforward, augmented by more than 1000 tables and illustrations. The excellent index more than made up for the difficulty I had discerning the organization of the chapter sequence.

This book would be a welcome addition to the library of any practicing family physician. More importantly, however, its philosophic basis, completeness, and diverse coverage make it an excellent