

Book Reviews

Minimizing Medical Mistakes: The Art of Medical Decision Making. By Richard Riegelman. 228 pp. Boston, Little, Brown, 1991. \$24.50 (paper). ISBN 0-316-74523-5.

The author's objective for this book is to develop a framework for analyzing the reasons for undesirable results in medical practice and to provide suggestions for preventing their occurrence. Medical mistakes imply that the physician should have done things differently; medical mistakes are preventable. Two types of mistakes are distinguished: errors of ignorance, and errors of implementation. Errors of implementation imply that the physician has problems with applying what he knows to the tasks of diagnosis and therapy. The author sets out to develop a framework for analyzing errors of implementation. He uses simple mnemonics to characterize the diagnostic process, the therapeutic process, and the process of developing a physician-patient relationship. At the end of the book he reflects on how physicians can deal with and accept their own errors and face their fallibility.

This book is elegantly written, well organized, and highly readable. The author presents current concepts in medical decision making and clinical epidemiology in a simple, qualitative, and straightforward fashion, using common clinical examples to illustrate difficult concepts and principles. The book should be required reading for all medical students.

This book should also be of great value to all physician teachers, because it provides a clear framework for teaching the process of medical decision making, a process that often occurs subconsciously in the mind of the experienced clinician. Finally, the book should be useful to all practitioners of the art of medical decision making, by providing a scientific basis for analyzing decisions and thus minimizing medical mistakes.

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Difficult Medical Management. Edited by Robert B. Taylor. 768 pp., illustrated. Philadelphia, W.B. Saunders, 1991. \$75. ISBN 0-7216-8768-7.

Difficult Medical Management is a multidisciplinary reference source describing the therapy for clinical problems that are difficult to treat. Because this type of medical problem makes up a large portion of the frustrating clinical challenges faced by family physicians, the content has great relevance to family practice. As I reviewed the Table of Contents, I could not help remembering my own difficult cases. The

majority of those management problems are dealt with here. In the preface, Dr. Taylor states, "The idea for this book came when I realized that I only use a small part of my large reference textbooks. The parts I use describe problems that are especially difficult to treat." Taylor has done a fine job of gathering management information on these difficult problems into one readable volume.

The readability of this book is generally good. Even difficult topics, such as current management of the HIV-infected patient, are discussed in a thorough yet practical way. Because the book has a number of authors, there is some variation in writing style and in readability. The editor, however, has done a satisfactory job of creating a product that has good internal congruency and avoids a "patchwork" quality.

The book is divided into 93 chapters, each covering a different medical management problem. The topics have been well selected. One hundred sixty-one authors, the majority of them not family physicians, contributed to this volume. The chapters are arranged alphabetically. The editing and type style are of high quality, and the graphs, tables, and figures are easy to read and understand. Unfortunately, the many chapters written by nonprimary care specialists or subspecialists sometimes lack a clear view of the role that the generalists play in treating these problems.

In the preface Dr. Taylor states that the book is written for the practicing clinician. After carefully reading the material, I agree. This book will be useful for practicing family physicians. It will serve as a refresher for management of uncommonly encountered problems and, to some extent, as an update on new developments in other problem management areas. The book will probably be less useful for family practice residents or for medical students, because it assumes some basic knowledge and, therefore, does not provide in-depth explanations. Furthermore, because it lacks depth, the book will probably be less useful to specialists or subspecialists unless they are dealing with problems that are outside their area of expertise.

While I strongly recommend this book for practicing family physicians, my major concern is that it will become rapidly outdated. Because medical therapeutics is a dynamic and ever-changing field, I hope that revised editions will be issued frequently to keep the text up to date. Even in the current edition, the most recent citations are dated 1989, thus implying at least a 2-year lag in information.

In summary, this book is recommended for practicing family physicians. It is laid out in a useful fash-