

# 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-

ion and functions well as a reference text. If frequent follow-up editions are issued, it will remain a useful volume. I hope that the editor will consider, however, having each future chapter co-written by a primary care physician working with another specialist or subspecialist. The resulting book would likely be of greater use to family physicians.

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**Private Practice: A Guide to Getting Started.** By Jack D. McCue and Robert D. Picalora. 290 pp. Boston, Little, Brown, 1991. \$22.95 (paper). ISBN 0-316-55531-2.

As a residency program director, I spend a great deal of time each year discussing with residents their plans and concerns about getting started in private practice. Although the AAFP practice management curriculum addresses many of their questions, I have continued to feel the need for an inexpensive reference to which I could direct residents. This book fulfills that need admirably.

*Private Practice: A Guide to Getting Started* is a paperback handbook specifically oriented toward the concerns about going into private practice from the perspective of a resident physician. It is written in a somewhat chronological order, with the first part dedicated to the question of initial career decisions, such as where to practice and the evaluation of job offers. The second part is a superficial discussion of the business side of a medical practice. The authors are clearly deliberate in this approach, as they primarily emphasize the importance of "doing it right the first time" by getting help and advice from expert sources.

The last two sections address the importance of achieving an appropriate balance in the management of the personal, as well as professional, parts of a physician's life. I was particularly impressed with the chapter entitled "The Care and Feeding of a Medical Education." Here mentioned are points that should be included in every graduation address!

The authors have taken great care to make this publication entertaining as well as informative. Major points are illustrated by the use of case studies, and they are not all success stories. The organization of the book is augmented by an excellent index, and each section is followed with references for further information. The advice contained is practical, timely, and based on real-life situations.

I believe this book is a valuable guide to the risks and rewards of entering the business we know as "private practice." Its affordability and resident perspective make it a unique resource for new physicians, and I encourage its inclusion in the personal library of every resident.

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**Infection Control in the Child Care Center and Preschool.** Edited by Leigh B. Donowitz. 364 pp. Baltimore, Williams & Wilkins, 1991. \$26 (paper). ISBN 0-683-02611-9.

This book is designed to serve as a concise and accessible reference for the problems of infectious and communicable diseases within the setting of preschool child care facilities. Most clinicians who care for children are aware of the frequency with which questions about communicable diseases arise and the need to provide advice about such practical issues as incubation periods, transmissibility, indications for exclusion, postexposure prophylaxis, and treatment options.

The major part of this publication deals with specific infecting organisms, listed alphabetically, and then discussed by clinical manifestations, causative agent, epidemiology, diagnosis, therapy, infectious period, and infection control. The book's many authors adhere to this format to provide consistency and readability. Each section is brief and gives only essential information without elaboration, controversy, or references. Generic topics, such as conjunctivitis and diarrhea, are not covered except as referenced by infecting agent in the index. Other chapters deal with high-risk children, such as those with immunodeficiencies, chronic heart or lung diseases, or handicaps, and another section deals with guidelines on prevention and hygiene for attendees and personnel. A useful appendix provides one-paragraph synopses of specific conditions intended to be "send-home" information for parents.

Physicians will find this book useful for its organization, which facilitates rapid access to answers on everyday questions. The nontechnical, condensed style makes the book valuable to nurses and receptionists called upon to provide telephone advice, and teachers and day-care workers will likewise find this to be a helpful and easily understood reference. Readers needing a more in-depth discussion, however, will require additional sources.

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**Managing Contraceptive Pill Patients. Sixth edition.** By Richard P. Dickey. 270 pp. Durant, OK, Essential Medical Information Systems, 1991. ISBN 0-929240-32-4.

Here is all you ever wanted to know about the pharmacology of birth control pills, and more. This pocket-sized book will be most useful as a reference, particularly for those in the process of forming their prescribing habits, i.e., residents. The potency and side effects of the various contraceptive pill formulations are organized according to four properties: their estrogenic, progestational, androgenic, and endometrial activities. This is an impossible amount to remember about each pill, so the various available pills are grouped with others of similar characteristics. By studying this reference, a practi-