Book Reviews

Current Diagnosis. Eighth edition. *Edited by Rex B. Conn. 1408 pp., illustrated. Philadelphia, W.B. Saunders Company, 1991. $95. ISBN 0-7216-2816-8.*

This eighth edition of the familiar diagnostic textbook edited by Conn without question keeps pace with the current status of medical practice. Every topic at the forefront in medicine, such as Lyme disease, AIDS, adolescent medicine, and the nutritional evaluation, receives high-quality coverage. Conn has invited several hundred authors to write on areas within their expertise, and each contributor has focused the discussion on the most efficient route to diagnosing a specific clinical condition. Errors and pitfalls, as well as formerly useful but no longer valued approaches in diagnosis, are described. Unlike most books dedicated to internal medicine, *Current Diagnosis* does not address disease epidemiology, etiology, or pathophysiology, and once a diagnostic consideration is presented, treatment is not approached; diagnosis is the only objective here.

The opening section (145 pages) aims at the workup of 28 common clinical problems found in internal medicine, pediatrics, otolaryngology, adolescent medicine, and genetic disease (e.g., fever, abdominal pain, fatigue, coma). For each topic, the editor presents a brief introduction, a differential diagnosis, and a diagnostic approach that is divided into pertinent history, physical, laboratory, therapeutic, and operative investigations as appropriate.

Tables and illustrations are excellent, abundant, and relevant to the diagnosis. Subsequent sections cover infectious disease, pulmonary medicine, cardiology, hematology, gastroenterology, endocrinology, neurology, psychiatry, and nephrology in a manner that in effect touches upon every commonly experienced clinical presentation. Especially helpful sections include basic gynecology, congenital disease, and developmental disorders.

The reader clearly will find this book an efficient tool through which to approach differential diagnosis. The authors all apply their outstanding clinical experience, "pearls," and shortcuts to make their points. The text, although technical, remains fluent throughout. The book appears far more suited to study in the library than to use in a busy office. A major asset of the book is the attention given to pointing out which diagnostic tests and pathways have fallen out of favor while providing easy access to the current recommendations.

Nearly every clinical diagnostic problem confronted in day-to-day practice is addressed in *Current Diagnosis*, and the reader is given a concise and timely approach to the patient's situation. Most primary care office libraries have one of the earlier editions of this book — and would benefit from having this one as well.

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How to Quickly and Accurately Master ECG Interpretation. Second edition. *By Dale Davis. 402 pp., illustrated. Philadelphia, J.B. Lippincott Company, 1991. $26.95 (paper). ISBN 0-397-51106-X.*

The author designed this book to be a hybrid, to serve as a cross between the elementary programmed learning electrocardiogram (ECG) texts and the comprehensive textbooks in electrocardiography. He nearly succeeded in putting together a perfect "stand-alone" ECG textbook for medical students, physician assistants, family practice residents, and practicing physicians. The text is one chapter short, however, in achieving this goal.

The book is thoughtfully organized to give readers a good understanding of ECG fundamentals. It is simply and clearly written and nicely illustrated, and it caters well to two kinds of ECG students: (1) those who will understand ECGs best when the learning points are rationally linked to three-dimensional images of the heart and its electrical vectors, and (2) those who will understand ECGs by memorizing rules and criteria. Either student will enjoy using this text.

The first nine chapters explain the basics of cardiac electrophysiology and the normal ECG. The latter chapters give the reader succinct instruction for evaluating abnormal ECGs, and the last two chapters display abnormal ECGs for the reader to practice differential diagnosis and interpretation skills, including a useful method for systematic ECG interpretation.

The chapter that is missing is on atrioventricular block and other common dysrhythmias. There is no mention, for example, of second- and third-degree atrioventricular block, the Wenckebach phenomenon, atrial fibrillation and flutter, ventricular dysrhythmia, or paroxysmal atrial tachycardia.

The remaining material is very strong, however, and I believe that medical students and residents would benefit from reading this book cover to cover and working all the "unknowns." They would, in so doing, learn about 90 percent of all the electrocardiography they need to know. The text is inexpensive, enjoyable to read, and has value as an easily referenced text to keep on the shelf for future use. The reader will need to have an additional text that discusses common cardiac dysrhythmias.

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