

Geriatric Home Care. Clinics in Geriatric Medicine.
Volume 7, Number 4. By Bruce A. Ferrell, and Laurence E.
Rubenstein. 892 pp. Philadelphia, W.B. Saunders, 1991. ISBN
0749-0690.

The aims of this book are to provide an overview of common geriatric problems encountered in home health care (HHC) practice, some broad perspectives on this industry, and suggestions to clinicians about how to manage a few specific geriatric problems. In reviewing this book, I will take these specific aims into consideration, from the perspective of both a teacher and a clinician.

The content of this text is highly relevant to family medicine, is well-written, and cites many useful references. Some key points central to the costs and benefits of geriatric home care, however, are made at the beginning of this book without giving sufficient details.

In chapter 1, five review articles summarizing the findings of well-controlled HHC studies are cited, and a table enumerates the number of positive and negative results of HHC studies in relation to specific effects. Regrettably, this information is provided without describing the nature, cost, and benefits of HHC interventions. The authors then state that the results from these studies are disappointing to policy makers with respect to these services acting as cost-containment measures. Obviously, such a conclusion raises economic and clinical questions about how and where to provide health care to elderly patients.

In chapter 2, the authors state that HHC offers enhanced quality of care and patient-family satisfaction, decreases cost, and reduces the number of iatrogenic and nosocomial problems; they then assert that home care is effectively established as the new community standard of care for certain health problems. Without citing references to make this assertion, this latter statement appears more of an article of faith than a statement derived from the results of health service research studies.

These examples are mentioned to raise an issue about the consistency of the messages conveyed in this book. Regrettably, two important chapters, Quality Assurance in Home Care and Cost-Effectiveness of Home Care, which partially address inconsistent messages conveyed earlier, come at the end of the book.

Reading from the perspective of a clinician and teacher, I find the content of this book to be useful background reading on HHC and the references in the chapters to be essential resources for further reading. I would recommend this book as a starting point for academicians who are unfamiliar with HHC and would like to learn more about this topic.

As a resource for inexperienced physicians, residents, and medical students, the chapters on medical topics could have had more checklists or summary tables, particularly on management issues. The chapter on home safety and falls is particularly good; it

provides a checklist for conducting an assessment on home safety. This chapter could be even more useful if it had tables to summarize the indications for investigations and management options for falls, so that physicians could quickly refer back to them when making clinical decisions with patients. Tables summarizing indications and management options would be useful in other clinical chapters as well.

This book also includes important chapters on social and community aspects of HHC issues: family dynamics and caregiver burnout, elder abuse, home hospice care, and multidisciplinary home rehabilitation. The chapter on geriatric assessment at home succinctly summarizes different types of home assessment.

As a resource for teachers and academicians, I would highly recommend adding this book to a library collection on home health care. As a resource for learners, I would selectively recommend chapters as reading materials.

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Handbook of Skin Clues of Systemic Diseases. Second edition. By Paul H. Jacobs, and Todd S. Anhalt. 150 pp. Philadelphia, Lea & Febiger, 1992. \$15.95 (paper). ISBN 0-8121-1464-7.

This manual, by two prominent dermatologists from Stanford University, is a concise, practical, and functional resource guide for the family physician who desires a reference for differential diagnosis based upon cutaneous manifestations of systemic disease. It is not meant to be read as a book as such, but as a user-friendly reference guide. The text alphabetically lists cutaneous findings, such as cyanosis, hyperpigmentation, papules, purpura, vesicular lesions, and nail changes, for example, which are followed by a listing of systemic diseases associated with each of these physical findings. The prose is straightforward, well organized, and easily read, and there are no illustrations to confuse the physician. This handy guide is a good reference for any busy practice or residency program. I believe that the audience best served by this guide would be physicians recently out of training or physicians in rural areas who do not have easy access to dermatology consultants.

The strength of this manual — its brevity — is also its weakness. The authors miss some of the subtleties of dermatologic diagnosis and assume that the clinician is able to diagnose and categorize lesions into the reference format. Physicians who are skilled at the subtleties of dermatologic diagnosis will find nothing new or particularly intriguing in this book. Nevertheless, this text, cataloged in a useful alphabetical manner, is a good guide for the basic cutaneous manifestations of systemic disease.

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