

## Book Reviews

**Allergy: Theory and Practice. Second edition. Edited by Phillip E. Korenblat and H. James Wedner. 608 pp., illustrated. Philadelphia, W.B. Saunders, 1992. \$95. ISBN 0-7216-7244-2.**

The fields of allergy and immunology have experienced a tremendous explosion of information during the last 10 years, and keeping up with the new information can be quite difficult. *Allergy: Theory and Practice* is being marketed as a clinically relevant book to update the nonallergist physician on the latest in allergy and immunology. Such a book should be quite useful given the frequency with which primary care physicians see allergy-related problems. According to the publisher, this second edition (printed 8 years after the first) contains 75 percent new information. For reasons that will be discussed, however, I do not believe this book is adequate for primary care physicians.

The book consists of 35 chapters divided into the following categories: Basic Allergic Mechanisms, Evaluation of the Allergic Patient, Manifestations of the Allergic State, Treatment of Allergic Diseases, Allergic Lung Disease, and Allergies to Specific Agents. The chapters, written by different authors, are of varying quality. The first quarter of the book consists of an extensive review of basic allergic mechanisms and includes a chapter on molecular immunology. The rest of the book is more clinical, emphasizing management of specific allergy-related diseases using pharmacologic, immunologic, and environmental interventions. Included is a good discussion of the various tests used to diagnose allergies, although there is some conflicting opinion among authors as to the value of each test. An extensive section on pharmacotherapeutics contains detailed and generally excellent chapters on each of the classes of medication used to treat allergic disease. Unfortunately, some information in the pharmacology chapters is already out of date, such as the availability of ophthalmic cromolyn and the use of theophylline as a first-line prophylaxis for asthma.

The major fault of the book as a primary care text is its specialist orientation. With the exception of a single family physician who helped with the chapter on indoor allergens, the authors are all university-based academic specialists and subspecialists. The resulting text has a high-technology bias that will likely frustrate most family physicians. For example, the book suggests that chronic sinusitis should not be treated until a computed tomographic scan of the sinuses has been done and that acute sinusitis should not be treated until cultures are obtained by means of an antral sinus puncture. (It does say that broad-spectrum antibiotics have been used empirically in cases where sinus puncture was not performed.) The diagrams showing surgical approaches to the sinuses

are not useful and simply add to the cost of the book while detracting from its credibility as a primary care text. Many controversial areas, such as proper management of otitis media or when to refer for polyethylene tube placement, are treated quite dogmatically with few references given to support conclusions. Because most patients with allergy-related disease never see university-based specialists, one could argue that these specialists are not the best ones to be writing a text for primary care physicians.

Perhaps the underlying problem with this book is that no specific audience is targeted. There is no Foreword or Introduction explaining for whom the text is written or even the purpose of the book. The chapters on allergic mechanisms and immunology are detailed enough for an allergy fellow, whereas the chapters on specific diseases are not. Some of the chapters are heavily referenced literature reviews, whereas the chapter on cutaneous allergy ends with a single reference from 1923. The promotional brochure suggests that the book is meant for primary care physicians, yet the text has a strong antiprimary care slant. My guess is that the target audience is the medical student taking an allergy course, which would explain the subspecialist orientation and the mix of the overly detailed with the overly simplified.

This book is expensive at \$95, just \$4 less than *Cecil's Textbook of Medicine*. Although parts are readable, informative, and useful, they are not enough to justify the expense, given the major flaws discussed above. I would recommend that primary care physicians or students thinking of primary care spend their \$95 elsewhere.

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**Cardiology. Sixth edition. By Desmond G. Julian and J. Campbell Cowan. 416 pp., illustrated. Philadelphia, W.B. Saunders, 1992. \$32.50 (paper). ISBN 0-7020-1644-6.**

This easily understood review of basic cardiology serves best the medical student embarking on a career in any area of medicine. It not only emphasizes the central principles in basic cardiology, but it also highlights the recent technological advances in the field — an essential update for most practitioners. As noted in the Preface, this edition has been thoroughly revised to document the progress in cardiovascular science accomplished during the past several years.

The book reads quickly, and for this reason should be considered an exceptional review instrument for the generalist. Accentuating the text are 147 key illustrations of pertinent rhythm strips, angiograms, radiographs, and diagrams. The Appendix summarizes frequently utilized medications and includes