

Book Reviews

Essentials of Family Medicine. Second edition. Edited by Philip D. Sloane, Lisa M. Slatt, and Peter Curtis. 446 pp., illustrated. Baltimore, Williams & Wilkins, 1993. \$32 (paper). ISBN 0-683-07759-7.

The editors of the second edition of *Essentials of Family Medicine* set out to provide a guide for medical students rotating through outpatient family practice. In fact, the book began as a syllabus for the University of North Carolina Family Medicine Clerkship. All but one author are currently North Carolinians, and most are teachers of family medicine.

Physically, *Essentials* is a 1-in (2.5-cm) thick, paper-bound book about 7 in (17.5 cm) by 10 in (25.5 cm) in size and weighing 0.85 kg, making it a bookshelf book rather than a pocketbook. Tables and figures are plentiful and legible. The book is typeset entirely in black and white.

Essentials is divided into three sections: Principles of Patient Care in Family Practice (12 chapters, 108 pages), Preventive Care (6 chapters, 61 pages), and Common Problems (27 chapters, 246 pages). In the first two sections, many chapters contain a case example to illustrate concepts. Although the book is aimed at medical students, each chapter contained information that was new or useful to me. I was surprised to learn that "only 26 percent of all households in the United States in 1991 consisted of a married couple with children living together" (although information presented in this manner is difficult to interpret).

Essentials generally has an academic bias. Based upon the advice in the book, each of our charts should contain a genogram, a family circle diagram, life cycle data, a social network inventory, and so on. Additionally, concerning prescription writing, the authors advise: "To avoid confusion in translating, Latin abbreviations (e.g., bid, ac, qhs) should not be used by physicians even though they seem convenient Notations such as . . . prn are confusing to patients and should be avoided." In instances when an academic bias truly helps me, such as memorizing one dosage for a drug (independent of age) in milligrams per kilograms per day, *Essentials* might list age-based dosages (e.g., 10 mg for one age, 5 mg for younger ages, etc.). Generally, the clinical advice appears standard.

I was disappointed to find that one of the primary concepts in all clinical practice and one of the primary differentiations between primary and tertiary care, that of pretest probability (and its impact upon predictive value of findings), was not described more fully. There were other small disappointments: one was an illustration of a child restrained in his mother's lap for an ear examination in which the physician was holding the otoscope like a hatchet (rather than like a

pencil) and in which the mother was using the wrong hand to restrain the child's head, failing to apply "the law of the lever." Master clinicians pay attention to the details that make difficult tasks appear easy. For a 1993 publication occasional information is dated, such as mention of AMA/NET in the present tense.

For medical students on a family medicine clerkship, this book seemed reasonable to me, so I asked the experts: medical students currently rotating with us and first-year residents who used the first edition during rotations last year. They all concurred that there were a few deficiencies in the Common Problems section (e.g., diarrhea, sexually transmitted diseases). They also thought the Principles of Patient Care section was more valuable for end-of-rotation test questions than for any practical use. The recommendation from this 100 percent unscientific convenience sample was to purge the Principles of Patient Care section and expand the Common Problems one. Other readers who might find *Essentials* useful include medical students wishing a quick overview of outpatient practice or outpatient-based allied health profession students.

Gary N. Fox, MD
Toledo, OH

Minor Surgery: A Text and Atlas. Second edition. By John Stuart Brown. 326 pp., illustrated. New York, Chapman & Hall Medical, 1992. \$79.95. ISBN 0-412-44910-2.

Dr. Brown, a general practitioner from England who has written a text on outpatient procedures applicable for a family physician, uses some British quotations to introduce his major sections. Chapter 33 on the proctoscope begins with the following:

The discharge of blood from the rectum is a disease chiefly confined to those advanced in life. It is occasioned by full living, abuse of purgatives, violent passions, or habitual melancholy. To this effect, leeches and warm formentations applied to the anus are the most efficacious remedies.

Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1817

This book is written for family physicians, and all the procedures described in the text are appropriate for ambulatory settings. The range of procedures covered, from simple lacerations and wound care to breast cyst aspiration to proctoscopy, is appropriate. Without a single text one might have to refer to general surgery, gynecologic, or gastroenterology texts to find all of these procedures.

Not all the procedures or patterns of practice, however, are ones to import directly from the United