

Book Reviews

Color Atlas of Dermatology. By Jeffrey P. Callen, Kenneth E. Greer, Antoinette F. Hood, Amy S. Peller, and Leonard J. Swinyer. 405 pp., illustrated. Philadelphia, WB Saunders, 1993. \$95. ISBN 0-7216-3756-6.

Family physicians encounter dermatologic problems frequently and on a daily basis in their practices. Some are readily recognizable and managed, whereas others present considerable challenge, especially in diagnosis. A number of dermatology texts are available to physicians in primary care as reference sources, but these are of variable quality and often are not helpful in sorting through a differential diagnosis. Most reference texts are organized by disease category, not by type of lesion or regional distribution, as such problems are encountered in everyday practice.

The Color Atlas of Dermatology represents an important advance to the physician in primary care who is commonly confronted with diagnostic dilemmas of dermatologic problems. It is organized in a manner to be most useful to the clinician faced with an undifferentiated and unlabeled dermatologic problem: (1) by the type of primary lesion and secondary changes, (2) by configurations, and (3) by distribution and regional predilection. *The Atlas* includes more than 1200 color photographs of skin lesions. They are consistently of high quality, the legends are clear, and in many instances they include relevant teaching points. There are 13 tables of differential diagnosis, together with four appendices (Genodermatoses, Cutaneous Infections, Cutaneous Changes Associated with HIV Infection, and Cutaneous Malignancies), and a complete index.

The Atlas affords three overlapping approaches to the clinician in making the diagnosis of a given dermatologic problem: (1) by *morphology* of the lesion itself, (2) by *configuration* of the lesions, and (3) by *regional distribution* of the lesions. Each or all of these approaches can be used to arrive at the diagnosis, with the further help of selected differential diagnosis tables. Within any of these three sections of the book, there is no particular sequence of the illustrated lesions, either by frequency or alphabetical order. The goal of the book is to present all common skin disorders of both adults and children, as well as some selected unusual or rare disorders seen in North America.

The Atlas is the best compilation of well-illustrated skin disorders that I have seen. I have already found it useful in practice on a number of occasions. The overlap between sections is often helpful. Despite its strengths, several limitations warrant mention. Because it is composed almost entirely of illustrations with little text, it needs to be supplemented by another dermatology text, especially with respect to treatment. It could also be improved if future editions were organized to convey a sense of relative prevalence of skin disorders (the authors acknowledge this point, but are not

compelling in their avoidance of this approach). Finally, the primary care physician might find some isolated examples of common skin disorders that were omitted from *The Atlas*. Despite these comparatively minor limitations *The Atlas* is very effective in meeting its goals. I strongly recommended it for inclusion in the working library of practicing generalists and residents in all of the primary care disciplines.

John P. Geyman, MD
Seattle, WA

Effective Medical Imaging: A Signs and Symptoms Approach. By Martin F. Sturman. Baltimore, Williams & Wilkins, 1993. 433 pp. \$45. ISBN 0-683-07934-4.

Written by a former primary care physician turned radiologist, *Effective Medical Imaging* coaches the family physician in the diagnostic evaluation of common clinical conditions with a strong but not exclusive focus on those tests usually requested of a radiology-nuclear medicine department. It is not intended to be a textbook of general radiology for primary care — it contains no radiographs — but, in the author's words, "is about the survival of common-sense medicine and the preservation of clinical judgment in an age of exploding technology"¹. The reader is provided with a radiologist's view of a common-sense approach to common conditions, with strong theoretic underpinnings in the Bayes theorem and an emphasis on utility of outcome in decision strategies.

The book begins with general principles of medical decision making, considering limitations and usefulness of classification schemes and the importance of prior probability, sensitivity, and specificity in ordering and interpreting tests. This section serves as a clear and concise summary of rational decision making and is applicable generally in medicine as well as in radiologic issues. The following chapters include advice regarding ordering specific types of imaging studies and describe the risks of various studies. I found these to be the least satisfying sections of the book. Risk of radiation is minimized with little specific information regarding individual procedures.

The heart of the book contains an analysis of 23 common clinical problems, such as acute abdominal pain, jaundice, thyroid masses, and a few laboratory and radiographic abnormalities. For each condition the author uses national inpatient and outpatient data to establish a hierarchy of likely diagnoses (as a starting point for prior probabilities) and discusses an optimal imaging approach to the condition. Where the data are available, the author's opinions are supported by test characteristics, but he also relies heavily on his experience. Dr. Sturman does not hedge his opinions; rather words that connote "always" (pelvic ultrasonography is "virtually mandatory in women with suspected appendicitis"²) and "never" ("endoscopic studies