

## Book Reviews

**Nelson Textbook of Pediatrics. Fifteenth Edition.** Edited by Richard E. Behrman, Robert M. Kliegman, Ann M. Arvin, and Waldo E. Nelson. 2200 pp., illustrated. Philadelphia, WB Saunders, 1996. \$95. ISBN 0-7216-5578-5.

The purpose of a textbook is to serve as a reference source for all of the compiled information relating to a certain area of study. By necessity this information must be digested and condensed to allow for comprehensive coverage within a single tome. That which does not fit should be referenced to guide the reader to additional sources. The reason for a new edition of a textbook is to discard information that is no longer held to be essential or correct and to add newly discovered information as well as more recent references.

The *Nelson Textbook of Pediatrics* has a long history of providing the essentials of the broad field of general pediatrics to both students and clinicians. This 15th edition comes 4 years since the last, and while the basic format is quite similar to previous editions, substantial changes have been made. Ann Arvin has replaced Victor Vaughn as one of the editors, and the list of contributors has been expanded from 137 to 221, of whom 154 are new. Its size has grown slightly from 1965 to 2200 (actual) pages, including an additional page of color plates of classic physical findings and six more pages to the table of contents. Chapter organization and the numbering system are new. The latter might affect those who use the table of contents numbers to reference their personal files. The use of contrasting colors for major subject headings was unfortunately deleted.

With regard to structure, the first section covers such general concepts as acute care, well care, nutrition, growth and development, and behavior. Next is genetics, metabolic diseases, and sections on the newborn and adolescent, followed by immune, allergic, rheumatic, and infectious diseases. Finally there is an anatomically arranged accounting of diseases of all the body systems. Tables display normal laboratory values (with conversion factors for micrograms to millimoles), drug dosages (including indications and precautions), and a listing of the contents of food products, infant formulas, and intravenous fluid solutions. Updates and additions address newer concepts of gene therapy, the *Hantavirus*, bone marrow transplantation, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (including material from the PALS course), and guidelines for the treatment of asthma and otitis media. A spot check of some recent advances found inclusion of gabapentin for the treatment of epilepsy, deoxyribonuclease for use in cystic fibrosis (approved in 1994), and a discussion of the use of human recombinant erythropoietin. The section on the human immunodeficiency virus has been shortened and seems less complete, and there is only brief mention of varicella vaccine. References in almost

every section have been revised and updated.

In summary, this new edition contains considerable revision, maintains a very comprehensive coverage of the entire scope of pediatrics, and carries on the long tradition of excellence that has sustained it as a standard in its field for many years.

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**Handbook of Ambulatory Medicine.** By Philip D. Zieve. Edited by L. Randol Barker, John R. Burton, and Philip D. Zieve. 665 pp., illustrated. Baltimore, Williams & Wilkins, 1995. \$29.95 (paper). ISBN 0-683-09374-6

The *Handbook of Ambulatory Medicine* is an abridged, pocket-sized version of the fourth edition of *Principles of Ambulatory Medicine* by Zieve, Barker, and Burton. The full text has been reviewed elsewhere and is well-known as an excellent and extensive treatment of ambulatory medicine. My review will address the pocket-sized version only. It is important to note that I consider the full text to be a valuable addition to any primary care physician's library. If you did not like the full text, then you will not like this abridged version and need not read any further.

Those of you who like Zieve, Barker and Burton's *Principles of Ambulatory Medicine* probably own it. The question then is why should you buy this abridged version. In his preface, Dr. Zieve notes that "[t]he objective of this book is to provide the most important information of the larger text and to serve as a springboard to the larger text when more detailed descriptions are required." He also notes the popularity of abridged versions of larger texts, partly because of cost and partly because of the need to acquire essential information quickly and easily. As will be discussed below, I am not sure that these reasons justify buying this book.

As does the larger text, this handbook deals primarily with ambulatory internal medicine, although there are also chapters on psychiatric and behavioral problems, selected general surgical problems, gynecologic problems, problems of the eyes and ears, and skin, feet, and dental problems. It has excellent tables, charts, and illustrations, and takes an evidence-based approach to care of patients. There are several tables that would serve as excellent patient education handouts. This information and more are included in the parent text. Unlike the parent text, however, there is a crowded feel to this handbook, similar to that of the information-packed note cards I used to carry as a resident. These note cards were helpful to me, but they were not particularly user-friendly to others trying to decipher them.

This brings me to the question of whether this book is worth buying. The original medical handbooks were the Washington University internal medicine "Wash