

Book Reviews

Conn's Current Therapy 1996. Edited by Robert E. Rakel. 1355 pp., illustrated. Philadelphia, W.B. Saunders, 1996. \$55. ISBN 0-7216-6259-5.

When I first started solo practice, among the first books I bought was the 1967 *Conn's Current Therapy*. Years later I discarded that book with the emotional attachment of an old friend. The 1996 version, the 48th edition of *Conn's Current Therapy*, appears to have carried on the tradition—it will have many old friends in the future.

It achieves its stated goal "to provide up-to-date information on recent advances in medicine, focusing on the treatment of problems frequently encountered in practice." As part of my review of the book, I used it in our teaching Family Medical Center. I checked out as many problems and diagnoses as I could while supervising our family practice residents and third-year medical students. I did not find any areas with which I had a major disagreement. The frequent small tables with recommended initial and maximal doses of medications are excellent, and inclusion of both trade and generic names of medications is the correct way for clarity.

Also covered are less common problems that can be serious if not diagnosed and managed appropriately. The only major complaint I have about this book is that some problems that are discussed are not very common; eliminating a number of these problems would make the book less weighty and still meet its main goals.

The material is presented in a concise and easy-to-read format. By allocating an average of four pages per subject, the articles are an appropriate length for a quick reference book. With 299 authors, 95 percent of whom are new, for 299 sections, an annual publication of this book is a massive undertaking that is managed well by the editor and the publishing company. In its 48th year of publication, *Conn's Current Therapy* has been and continues to be an excellent quick reference book.

Max A. Crocker, MD
University of Kentucky
Lexington, Ky

Emergency Medical Therapy. Fourth Edition. Edited by Terry J. Mengert, Mickey S. Eisenberg, and Michael K. Copass. 992 pp. Philadelphia, W.B. Saunders, 1996. \$45 (paper). ISBN 0-7216-5162-3.

Twenty-five contributors have assembled this revision of a soft-cover manual for diagnosis and management of adult emergency problems. The editors have targeted the book toward students, house officers, and practitioners of emergency medicine. The content of the manual is appropriate as an initial reference for

family physicians encountering adult emergencies in the office or emergency department. Only acute medical problems are included, because the authors believed that the reader would be better served by a shorter book and by reference to other sources that comprehensively deal with trauma, such as the *Advanced Trauma Life Support Course Syllabus* by the American College of Surgeons. *Emergency Medical Therapy* is organized into (1) a general introductory section describing the initial triage of emergency patients, documentation requirements, pain management, and conscious sedation (28 pages); (2) medical chief complaints (eg, dizziness) that can get the workup started when the diagnosis is unknown (110 pages); and (3) medical emergencies arranged by diagnosis (726 pages).

The manual is written with clarity and consistency despite the great number of contributors. Tables and flow charts are used throughout; however, there are very few illustrations, mainly electrocardiogram rhythm strips. Occasionally we found the manual difficult to navigate because cross-references were in outline format, eg, "see Chapt. 11 (IV. A. 1)," which would require too much reading and searching should the information be needed urgently. An annoying inconsistency in the use of italics was noted; in one chapter all the physical signs of the disorder being described were italicized, whereas in the next chapter they were not.

The strengths of this manual were its tables (eg, Recommended Initial Mechanical Ventilator Settings and Antibiotic Therapy of Cellulitis) and the up-to-date references at the end of each chapter. The arrangement of Section II by chief complaint is excellent for students and younger house officers who might lack well-developed diagnostic skills or for the more seasoned clinician who needs to expand a differential diagnosis. At the end of most chapters is a paragraph entitled "Pearls and Pitfalls," and these reminders of the dos and don'ts for a particular problem were extremely useful.

This manual is a useful addition to the reference shelf in the emergency department or to the office library of a primary care physician.

Charles E. Driscoll, MD
Steve Fowler, MD
Iowa City, Iowa

Positioning Your Practice for the Managed Care Market. Edited by J. Thomas Danzi. 235 pp. Baltimore, Williams & Wilkins, 1996. \$29 (paper). ISBN 0-683-02373-X.

The intent of this book, as outlined in the preface, is to educate physicians about managed care, managed care contracts, and the evaluation of their care provided by managed care companies. This book serves as a primer on the topic of managed care, and the authors do a rea-

sonable job of achieving their goals. The authors are knowledgeable and well prepared to write about their respective subjects, though authors with a wider geographic distribution (all were from the northeastern United States) might have provided a broader view of the topics. The chapter titled "The Provider's Perspective," for example, was written by an internist from an academic medical center.

The first half of the book reviews the fundamental elements of managed care for the practicing physician: definitions, reimbursement arrangements, and financial and clinical assessments of practice. Though accurate in content, the chapters, written at a very basic level, were long and often boring. The chapter on financial assessment (Chapter 6), however, did contain an excellent review of activity-based costing methods of cost accounting.

"Clinical Outcomes" (Chapter 9) was a well-written overview of this important topic. The following chapter on quality improvement proved to be disappointing—comprehensive yet rambling. The strongest chapters in the book were Chapters 11 and 12 on the legal implications of managed care. The authors here provide a thorough and understandable presentation of the legal minefields facing physicians in managed care and integrated physician organizations.

Positioning Your Practice for the Managed Care Market provides a solid overview on a complex subject. The book will provide a nice reference to the practicing physician who has little background in managed care and should serve as a learning tool for medical students and residents as well.

Keith A Frey, MD, MBA
Providence St. Peter Hospital
Olympia, Wash

Differential Diagnosis of Common Complaints. Third Edition. By Robert H. Sellar. 407 pp., illustrated. Philadelphia, W.B. Saunders, 1996. \$29.95 (paper). ISBN 0-72165808-3.

As stated in the book's Preface, patients generally come to their physician's office with varying complaints or symptoms rather than with specific diagnoses. This new edition paperback provides a framework for trying to sort out the myriad of diagnostic possibilities that arise from a certain specific symptom. Its usefulness to primary care physicians should be obvious, especially in today's medical climate, where they act as gatekeeper and see the patients on the front line, compared with years ago when patients might have sought out a specialist they thought would handle their complaint.

The author addresses 36 of the most common complaints patients have when seeing their physician. Topics include abdominal pain, cough, forgetfulness, dizziness, fatigue, chest pain, gynecologic problems, extremity pain, and weight issues, with a separate chapter dedicated to each complaint. The chapters are subdivided into sections to provide a diagnostic decision-making framework for the specific complaint. The

sections include a general description of the problem, the nature of the patient and the symptoms, associated symptoms, precipitating, aggravating, and ameliorating factors, physical findings and diagnostic tests, and less common diagnostic considerations. The chapters are well laid out and have easy-to-read tables that take the reader through a concise differential diagnosis of the more common causes of the specific symptom. References are provided at the end of each chapter, and a thorough index is included. Other helpful tables and illustrations are found throughout the chapters.

A major drawback of this text is that, in general, treatments and therapeutics are not discussed, but this information can easily be found in other texts that most practicing physicians would have on hand.

This book can be used by physicians, residents, medical students, and other medical personnel. I would highly recommend its use by medical students during their initial clinical rotations. Despite possibly sounding like it would have limited usefulness to a seasoned practicing physician, this text does live up to its title and can be a useful resource when in doubt about a particular patient. The text can reassure or suggest more directions to pursue.

Ralph W. Dickson, MD
McSherrystown, Pa

Consultations in Gastroenterology. Edited by William J. Snape, Jr. 968 pp., illustrated. Philadelphia, W.B. Saunders, 1996. \$125. ISBN-7216-4670-0.

In this first edition, Dr. Snape attempts to create a text that will meet most needs of the primary care physician. He has designed this book "...to sit by the generalist's hand and provide guidance for the care of their patient" regarding gastrointestinal disease. This statement alone will catch the eye of primary care physicians who are interested in having the right gastroenterology text at their fingertips. The author hopes that this book will "fill the niche" as a useful resource and "how-to manual for treatment."

The book is divided into 7 separate sections. The sections are organized into chapters written by one of the 208 authors, each of whom has recognized expertise in the condition or disease. The first section, entitled "General" contains 23 chapters addressing the most common gastrointestinal complaints and symptom complexes encountered by primary care physicians (eg, nausea and vomiting, dyspepsia, chronic constipation, fecal incontinence, diarrhea). There is even discussion of some common pediatric topics (eg, "Foreign Bodies in Children," "Gastrointestinal Tract Hemorrhage in Children"). The chapters give full coverage of each topic, ranging from pathophysiology, diagnostic strategies, and differential diagnoses to appropriate treatment strategies.

The remaining sections are organized by specific organ systems: esophagus, stomach, intestinal tract, pancreas, and hepatobiliary tract, with each section con-