
BOOK REVIEWS

The Specialist Registrar Handbook 2nd Edition. John Garrett, Tony White. Radcliffe 2001. £24.95. PB. Pp 324. ISBN No. 1-85775-464-6.

This book scores a magnificent own goal in that the title bears no relation to its contents and positively discourages large sectors of the medical profession who would benefit greatly from its advice. This is even commented on in the Foreword, written by the President of the Royal College of Pathologists, "It is a shame that the title confines the readership to the specialist registrar grade, because the contents would educate and inform many other professional staff in the NHS, not least consultants". I would like to add GPs and all members of the DMS.

John Catrell is the deputy head of a business school, Tony White a consultant otolaryngologist, but together they have come up with a highly readable and compelling text on learning, management, applying for jobs and understanding the NHS. The learning objectives for the book are long, commencing with identifying your learning styles, organising your time, delegation of tasks, making effective presentations and effective team working. The usual understanding and dealing with conflict, stress management and strategy for meetings are covered, progressing through requesting post mortems and appearing at a coroner's inquest.

The topics are covered simply, but clearly, and are more of a good introduction than a detailed analysis and more specialised texts will have to be consulted for a deeper understanding. The sections on educational theory and learning styles are more aimed at GP registrars in early training than the budding trainer, but their very readability makes it a highly useful introduction. The six pages on giving a presentation and use of visual aids should be revisited by all who stand in front of audiences.

It cannot be recommended that all should immediately rush and buy this text, but it is a great coffee time book to be skimmed and re-opened on many occasions. I just wish the title were different.

Col JE Burgess
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Groups, A Guide To Small Group Work In Healthcare, Management, Education And Research. Glyn Elwyn, Trisha Greenhalgh and Fraser Macfarlane. Radcliffe 2001. £27.50. PB. ISBN No. 1-85775-400-X.

Group work is an established method of working both in management and education although it is not always recognised for the power and potential of the method. The recently published guide on small group work is a good overview of how to use groups in educational, research and organisational settings, the potential pitfalls and how to overcome them. It is particularly written to assist a facilitator in when to use groups, as it provides a good summary of the research literature. Guidance is also given on the process of group work – the use of "ice breakers" or how to deal with a dysfunctional member or group as examples. Overall the book is well written, with many practical examples. It is recommended to those who are likely be called upon to facilitate a group, whether this be in educational or management settings.

Lt Col Jonathan Leach
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Safe Transfer and Retrieval: The practical approach. ALSG. Editors Peter Driscoll, Ian Maccartney, Kevin Mackway-Jones, Peter Oakley. BMJ £35.00. PB. Pp vii – 137. ISBN No. 0-7279-1583-5.

DMS personnel can expect to be involved in patient transfer throughout their clinical careers either within the NHS or in the operational environment. Patient transfer is frequently complicated by clinical and logistic problems.

This book from the Advanced Life Support Group has been written both as a course manual and as a stand alone reference. As well as giving clinical guidance the book contains advice on communications, radio procedures, legal issues and working around helicopters. The contents are well set out, easy to read and learning points are highlighted in 'boxes'.

Following the advice in this book should assist DMS personnel in performing safe patient transfers and I strongly recommend it.

Maj PF Mahoney RAMC
Consultant in Anaesthesia

The ABC of Spinal Cord Injury 4th Edition. Edited by David Grundy and Andrew Swain. BMJ 2002. £16.95 Illust. PB. Pp vi – 88. ISBN No. 0-7279-1518-5.

This book provides a very good introduction for anyone who is involved in the management of spinal cord injuries from the emergency department, intensive care, wards and spinal units. It is arranged logically and well illustrated, so that one follows the patient from the accident, through the emergency management, to definitive management and then nursing care to rehabilitation and home. Its greatest strength is that it highlights the potential problems and complications at all stages, both physical and psychological.

However, the anatomy of the spine and spinal cord is not well covered in the book and so prior knowledge of this is required if the reader is to gain the most from the text.

The second chapter, which briefly covers extraction and then discusses initial treatment, tries to cover too much and would have been better separated, enabling more focus on the on scene management. The following chapter on management in the emergency department would then be able to place more emphasis on the importance of primary survey and the need to exclude other serious injuries and appropriate treatment of life threatening injuries, before detailed analysis of spinal cord injury. This important message was buried in the text. This would also have been the logical chapter to discuss the controversies over the use of steroids, as they need to be given promptly if they are to be used.

I would recommend this book to any paramedics, junior doctors and nursing staff who may be faced with managing spinal cord injuries as it provides a valuable, comprehensive introduction to this topic.

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Oxford Handbook of General Practice. C Simon, H Everitt, J Birtwistle, B Stevenson. Oxford University Press 2002. £22.95. PB. ISBN No.0-19-263270-1.

The recently published Oxford Handbook of General Practice is the latest in the series of excellent reference handbooks for clinicians. The Handbook of General Practice is structured in a similar fashion to the other books in the series and as a consequence the vast majority of clinicians will feel immediately at home. Subjects covered range from practice management through endocrinology to general practitioner obstetrics, palliative care, eponymous syndromes and emergencies in general practice. In addition to the succinct

text on diseases commonly seen in general practice, it contains useful contact addresses, references and websites to allow for further information to be found quickly and easily.

The Oxford Handbook of General Practice should be available for all clinicians working in general practice. It contains a wealth of information that is easily accessible and is ideal to remind oneself of a particular condition or management strategy. It is highly recommended as a text suitable for Summative Assessment or MRCGP revision.

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Wellington's Doctors. Dr Martin Howard. Spellmount 2002. £25.00. Illust. Pp viii + 260. ISBN No 1-86227-143-7.

For such an important period in the history of the British Army there has long been lacking a comprehensive account of the Army Medical Services during the Napoleonic Wars. Cantlie, in his History of the Army Medical Department, devotes three chapters to the wars and Lady Mary McGrigor recently edited the autobiography of Sir James McGrigor, which includes his accounts of the Peninsular campaigns.

At long last we are now blessed with a book devoted entirely to the medical services of the British Army in the Napoleonic wars and it has been worth waiting for. Dr Martin Howard, a hospital consultant and a member of the Society for Army Historical Research has provided us with an important resource for the study of Wellington's medical services. He starts by introducing the reader to the army doctor and his training and provides us with both contemporary praise and criticism of the army doctor. He has used much primary source material, some from the RAMC archives, to obtain first hand accounts of soldiers of Wellington's armies who may have suffered or been saved at the hands of the army doctor.

Subsequent chapters inform us of various aspects of the medical services of the period. 'In Battle' enlightens us with what it was like for the regimental surgeon under fire, what equipment he carried and how he performed. On the other side of the fence he uses accounts of wounded to tell us how they were treated and we learn that in many cases they were lucky to survive to get to a field hospital and then had to survive the rigours of, in some cases, brutal and unskilled surgery.

The wounded French soldier enjoyed a far better organised medical service and one notable difference between the British and French medical services was that the latter

provided transport for their wounded. Dr Howard informs us that in the British army we relied on the formation of sick convoys, which used rough un-sprung local wagons which resulted in a tortuous journey, over rough tracks and lacking in everything but rudimentary medical care during often long journeys.

Subsequent chapters deal with the hospitals of the period, surgery and there is also a chapter dedicated to disease and its treatment.

There are seven appendices covering such

subjects as the contents of medical chests, surgical instrument sets and various returns of operations and causes of death over the period. Included is an extensive bibliography and sources of notes, which leads the reader to further study.

This book will become the definitive work on the subject and will be enjoyed by not only the medical historian but also the general reader with an interest in the Napoleonic wars. It is well recommended.

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