
BOOK REVIEWS

The Knife Man. The Extraordinary Life and Times of John Hunter, the father of modern surgery. Wendy Moore. Bantam Press 2005. £18.99. Pp xiii-482. Illust. ISBN No. 0-59305-209-9.

The subtitle of Wendy Moore's new book sums it up in a nutshell; The extraordinary life and times of John Hunter, and what an extraordinary life it was.

Hunter came from a farming, not a medical family, but his brothers were all afforded the opportunity to follow academic careers; James as a lawyer and William to Glasgow University. Initially John detested academic studies and Moore feels that this is probably why his mind turned more to the practical forms of investigation rather than by studying books and papers. His father's farm afforded the earliest opportunity for dissection.

During the early years of his life Hunter would witness sickness and death closely. His brother William ceased his training for the Kirk and turned to medicine, eventually setting himself up in London. John would follow him and take the first steps in a long and distinguished career. Moore charts this career by taking various cases from Hunter's Case Book and heading chapters appropriately – *The Dead Man's Arm; The Pregnant Woman's Womb; The Professor's Testicle etc.* She uses the chapters not only to describe these cases and their management, but how the history of medicine itself was shaping up during the period.

Hunter's practical talent was quickly becoming apparent and his reputation spreading. His brother's large anatomy school and dissecting room was never short of bodies, some acquired by Hunter by fair means or foul. He also dissected animals. During this time not only would Hunter gain a reputation but also enemies. He also began to fall out with his brother William.

In 1761 John joined the Army and in March found himself aboard ship en route to Belle Isle. He was to witness the disastrous initial assault and afterwards spend many hours treating the wounded. A second assault, some weeks later, was more successful and the British took control of the island. Although on this second assault there were less wounded to treat, the sickness rate mounted daily and the island became a pestilential place, claiming the lives of many. Hunter used unorthodox methods to treat these sick and wounded and in some cases incurred the wrath of his contemporaries. As the months dragged on he became impatient for a move to Portugal, which he achieved in the summer of 1762.

In 1763 he eventually returned to England, went on half pay and resumed his medical practice, or more specifically, his dental practice.

The book continues to chart the remainder of Hunter's full and turbulent life, his marriage, his teachings and eventually his death.

There have been other books on John Hunter but Moore's book not only charts his life but also gives the reader a general insight into medicine through the 18th century.

Illustrated with some excellent plates, it is a fine book and recommended.

PH Starling
Curator
AMS Museum

ABC of Subfertility. Edited by Alison Taylor, Peter Braude. BMJ Books 2004. £17.95. Illust. PB. Pp 51. ISBN No. 0-72791-534-7.

It was a great pleasure to review the ABC of Subfertility. Regular readers of the British Medical Journal will remember a series of articles on fertility that appeared in this journal in the latter part of 2003. These articles are now available together in this book published by BMJ Books.

The editors and most of the authors are from, or have been associated with, the Guys and St Thomas' Fertility Unit in central London. Having spent six years at St Thomas' as both a registrar and senior registrar in Urology, I know from personal experience that this is a world class unit at the leading edge of research into reproductive medicine.

The book provides an excellent overview of the investigation and treatment of subfertility in both males and females, at a level eminently suitable for general practitioners. It would also give a good grounding for junior doctors and nursing staff either involved or with, an interest in, the investigation and treatment of subfertility. Fertility treatment continues to move forward in leaps and bounds and, in spite of this, the text remains surprisingly up to date, which is a credit to the authors and editors.

As a urologist with a substantial male subfertility practice, I found the chapters on female subfertility particularly illuminating. I will now be better able to answer the questions that are asked by couples with both male and female factor problems that so often present in the clinic.

The book is well produced with many illustrations and useful tables. There are summary points and lists at the end of each chapter which are ideal for quick reference during a busy clinic or surgery.

I highly recommend this book for anyone who is involved with the management of couples with subfertility.

HGA Naerger FRCS (Urol)
Consultant Urological Surgeon

The Information Governance Toolkit. Second Edition. Tobias Keyser and Christine Dainty. Radcliffe Publishing 2005. Pp vi-201. ISBN No 1-85775-600-2.

This book aims to give primary care organisations the means with which to handle the management of patient information in line with current legislation and produce their own strategies. It is a detailed, closely written text that requires concentration, but it is worth persevering with if you have any responsibility for information management. The authors have pulled together all the relevant information regarding the development and implementation of information management policy. They have produced a toolkit that is invaluable, based on their own solutions and experience on setting up within a number of PCTs. They have related each section to specific parts of the current legislation, and it looks at the compliance necessary with the requirement and then tells you how to achieve it.

The book has only six chapters, and you could be fooled into thinking it a quick read. Don't be. It is split into two parts, with part one concentrating on information governance with 20 detailed sections and part two concentrating on applying the principles in practice, along with examples that engage you with useful pointers for discussion. This format allows the reader to focus on specific areas very quickly, or work through every section as a reference to producing a complete policy. These range from staff induction and safe haven procedures to an implementation strategy. The coverage of all the legal and ethical issues surrounding the use of patient data is excellent, and sections are accompanied by templates and checklists where applicable. Each section is clearly linked to allow for cross referencing within the book's own chapters, and at the end of each section is a list of references and websites to assist in examining specific area in more detail if required. All the hard work has been done for you, and it just requires time to work through all the sections. Use this in conjunction with the NHSIA toolkit and you have the framework to assure your organisation can meet all the Information management standards.

Lt Col J Cotterell SOI CG
HQ APHCS

Skills for Communicating with Patients. Second Edition. Jonathan Silverman, Suzanne Kutz, Judith Draper. Radcliffe Publishing 2005. £27.59. Pp xiii -262. ISBN No. 1-85775-640-1.

This is the second version of a pair of books, the other being Teaching and Learning Communication Skills in Medicine, which were first published in 1998. It is firmly academic in approach to patient communication and is evidence based and pragmatic rather than charismatic. It is not the kind of book that you can pick up and delve into between patients but requires full concentration. It is structured on the Framework of the enhanced Cambridge - Calgary Guides (2003), which I am not aware of as being standard texts, but the five headings are very familiar; Initiating the session, Gathering Information, Physical examination, Explanation and planning and Closing the session. Running alongside this they explore Providing structure and Building the relationship. The layout is clear with stated objectives and skills and patient/ doctor examples, diagrams and shaded boxes and a summary at the end of each chapter. The list of 71 Communication Process Skills is a bit daunting, but logical, and the style of repetitive learning rather than "flash" understanding will suit some readers. The final chapter is an interesting look at specific issues such as age, breaking bad news, hidden depression and psychosis and cultural and social diversity with some positive practical suggestions which are well presented.

The stated reason for producing a second edition was to update the literature and reflect development and changes in medical and education practices in the last six years. Communication with patients is an evolving field and it is helpful to have the science behind what we do every day. A few of the numerous, well used communication model texts, such as Pendleton and Neighbour, are quoted in addition to more international research evidence in the 18 pages of references. The authors feel that the book can be used throughout medical education from undergraduate to Consultant or trained GP and also facilitators, programme directors and medical education administrators including politicians. I feel that it is probably of most use to trained doctors who are looking to improve their patient communication skills but already have a firm understanding of the consultation models, or those in a teaching role who can distil some of this evidence into a slightly less daunting format for their students. It would be useful for higher professional training such as the MRCGP, and of note one of the authors is the external assessor of the MRCS

Clinical Communication Skills Examination. Doctors need to strive to continually improve their practice and to quote the first words of the book “if you cannot communicate, it doesn’t matter what you know”.

Maj AJ Everest RAMC BSc, MB ChB,
MRCGP
MO RMAS

The Inner Consultation - how to develop an effective and intuitive consulting style. Second Edition. Dr Roger Neighbour. Radcliffe 2005. £24.95. PB. Pp266. ISBN No. 1-85775-679-7.

The Inner Apprentice - An awareness centred approach to vocational training for general practice. Second Edition. Dr Roger Neighbour. Radcliffe 2005. £24.99. PB. Pp176. ISBN No. 1-85775-670-3.

Few books could claim to have had a significant impact not just on the way the general practitioner vocational training is taught but also how it is assessed and ultimately how the consultation is conducted many thousands of times every day. The first editions of the Inner Consultation and the Inner Apprentice fall into a very small number that have had a major influence upon general practice. They have been widely used and applied since the early 1990s and they are required reading for virtually every general practitioner registrar, as well as those

wishing to have a greater understanding of the consultation and secondly an awareness centred approach to education.

Both books are well written with regular “exercises” that allow for reflection and internalisation of the concepts being put across. The Inner Consultation has been updated with the majority of the book being taken up introducing and discussing the Neighbour “model of the consultation” (Connecting, Summarising, Handing over, Safety Netting and House Keeping). All doctors (not just general practitioners) could learn this simple approach to communicating and enhancing patient contact especially coupled with the very important skill of House Keeping (maintaining one’s personal health) in an ever-busier world. The Inner Apprentice is directed both at teachers and learners and draws from many philosophers and legends of ancient Greece. Whilst the whole book has been updated it contains one extra chapter on the importance of awareness-based teaching in a very over-crowded general practitioner educational curriculum.

Overall both books are highly recommended to doctors with clinical and/or educational responsibilities, not just general practitioners. They are well written and, unlike many others, have stood the test of time.

Col J Leach
Professor of Primary Care and General
Practice