

High Altitude Medicine and Physiology

4th Edition. West JB, Schoene RB and Milledge JS.

Hodder Arnold, London 2007.

Price: £79.00. 480 pages.

ISBN: 978-0-34-091344-4

This is the fourth edition of the most comprehensive guide to high altitude medicine and physiology available. This edition features a new author following the death in 2005 of Michael Ward, who was one of the World's most experienced high altitude doctors. However, the authors still have a combined experience of over a hundred years of high altitude medicine and have taken part in most of the significant field expeditions in the last 40 years. The new edition features updates including the latest influences of genetics and molecular biology on high altitude physiology.

The chapters follow a systems-based approach and there are useful sections on pre-existing medical conditions at altitude and athletic performance at altitude as well as a review of nutrition and metabolism. The text is interspersed with case studies, which help to conceptualise the 'hard' physiological facts—a process many of us use for clinical learning. There are many informative charts and graphs as well as black and white photographs.

The authors do well to extract the relevant information from a wide variety of references and to present it in a comprehensive fashion, particularly as most early high altitude research projects were significantly underpowered and a great deal were 'observational' at best. Each statement is carefully referenced and the quality of the studies commented on. This is especially useful, as most climbers seem to receive poor quality medical information through popular myth. Clinicians advising those going to altitude will find it particularly valuable when discussing acclimatisation, if only to ensure a safe ascent profile and protect people from the peril and expense of quackery.

With the existing Armed Forces commitments to high altitude zones such as Afghanistan, as well as an increase in adventurous training activities to mountainous areas, this text serves as a good reference on which clinicians can base their advice on the best evidence available. High Altitude Medicine and Physiology would be suited to those with a strong interest in this field, as well as those with occupational medicine interests and candidates undertaking the Diploma in Mountain Medicine through the University of Leicester. Those with a more casual or sporadic interest may be daunted by the level of detail and price of this text, and may be better served by the Royal Geographic Society's 'Expedition Medicine' or the 'High Altitude Medicine Handbook' by Pollard and Murdoch.

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Oxford Specialist Handbooks: Vascular Surgery

Hands L, Murphy M, Sharp M, Ray-Chaudri S.

Oxford University Press 2007.

£39.99 480pages

ISBN: 978-0-19-920308-6

Somewhat fortuitously this half A5 size pocket book dropped onto my doormat requiring review some three weeks before I sat the Intercollegiate FRCS exit exam in General Surgery and I was more than happy to read it cover to cover! It is primarily aimed at vascular surgery trainees but may also be '*valuable for foundation year trainees, vascular fellows, vascular nurses, anaesthetists, intensivists and vascular radiologists*' which is a wide ranging remit.

It is divided into 22 chapters and covers the generality of vascular surgery such as signs, symptoms, history taking and non-operative management of conditions such as venous ulcers and risk modification for arteriopathies before considering the techniques and pitfalls of both arterial and venous surgery on a region by region basis. It is a well written book with high quality line drawings to accompany the operative detail, but the clinical images do not reproduce very well and are too small to be of real value. In addition, the chapter on investigation of vascular disease could usefully have been augmented with examples of the various imaging modalities described such as MRA or traditional angiography.

The text is didactic as is generally the case with handbooks of this nature, but I suspect that a trainee vascular surgeon would like more detail of the evidence behind some of the approaches and techniques used. It is a smart, well written and well presented book but my own feeling is that it falls between two stools. It is neither the comprehensive vascular reference that vascular trainees would be looking for or the ready reference guide for all those other groups of people it suggests it might be of value to and would I hazard, balk at paying forty pounds for it. The populations to whom it would probably be most use are specialist registrars in general surgery who could use it as a revision text, or as a refresher prior to being roped into assisting the vascular consultant in the middle of the night or those general surgeons who will continue to require to be able to perform on a vascular stage outside of their normal speciality on a predictable if infrequent basis. In the current climate in UK this is essentially the military surgeon. The chapter on basic techniques in vascular surgery including exposure of all the main arterial trunks and vascular anastomosis would be a most helpful crib in an hour of need.

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