BOOK REVIEWS


The first edition of this paperback was a compilation of 16 articles which appeared in the British Medical Journal. After only a 2-year interval a second edition is available. I understand that this is because of the success of the first edition and because of the significant changes in the labelling of blood and blood products which has necessitated the change of all illustrations, in this heavily illustrated work, which feature pack labels. The multi-authorship has acquired an additional name and the format has remained essentially unaltered. Careful comparison of the two editions confirms changes of detail in a majority of chapters to bring the material completely up to date, relating to matters, for example, of testing of donations for antibody to hepatitis C virus and HIV 2.

Overall the book is aimed, successfully, at those who use blood but who work in specialties other than transfusion medicine, and this is emphasized by the editor. It contains a great deal of what the trainee anaesthetist, theatre nurse and operating department assistant need to know about blood transfusion from donor to clinical area and much more besides. It should be read by all these groups, as it is admirably succinct (62 pages of text) and perhaps also by those who consider ourselves fully trained.

The concluding chapter by the National Director of the Blood Transfusion Service in England and Wales confirms that the U.K. is now self sufficient in blood and blood products—a situation which can only be maintained by intelligent usage, as so carefully set out in the book.

J. K. Wood


This edition of the quarterly British Medical Bulletin is concerned with pain, its mechanisms and management. The editors have assembled a host of well-known clinicians and scientists in order to provide 18 relatively short reviews on nearly every aspect of pain, both acute and chronic. There is no logical format to the book, but the chapters can be divided broadly into those concerned with basic physiology, clinical practice, pharmacology and psychology.

Woollf gives an excellent account of the central generation of acute pain and there are chapters on the chemical activation of nociceptive peripheral neurones, mechanisms of acute visceral pain and peripheral and central mechanisms of neuropathic pain. These purely scientific reviews are probably the best in the book; each chapter is well written, referenced and illustrated.

The clinical reviews are in general very good also, but some suffer from the fact that the authors have been asked to cover very large areas of interest in relatively short articles. Consequently, some of these tend to be rather superficial, but they do provide an excellent start for the reader with little knowledge of the subject. An example of this is the chapter describing the clinical management of acute pain. This is an enormous area and the authors have attempted to give a very comprehensive in their treatment of the subject. Consequently, it lacks detail. Other reviews of clinical practice include the management of sympathetic pain, neuropathic pain syndromes and pain in children.

There is a fine review of the clinical pharmacology of opioids in this book and articles concerned with psychological aspects of pain, both genesis and treatment, are well written and balanced.

Who will find this book useful? It is to be recommended for all those sitting the F.R.C.A. Anaes. Part 3 examination and for those clinicians who are not in the field of pain management but feel that they need a broad picture of present clinical and academic activity in this specialty. It is not for, and I suspect not aimed at, specialists in pain management.

D. Rowbotham


It is surprising that such a simple concept as medical audit has created so many different interpretations and methods of application. Every medical specialty has developed audit tailored to its own requirements, so that at the present time medical audit has a myriad of facets which may be difficult to make sense of.

This book gives a snap-shot in time to convey the current state of medical audit in acute hospital services in the U.K. The first half of the book gives a global description of medical audit from its history and national organization to the principles of its practice, common methods of application and the resources required to undertake it. The second half is separated into chapters describing medical audit in each of the major hospital acute specialties.

The section on Anaesthetics and Intensive Care gives a short account of most of the published work on anaesthetic audit and there is a good selection of references. It is disappointing that Intensive Care does not feature very greatly, although this probably reflects the volume that has been written on this subject. Subjects covered include national guidance from the College, a brief description of difficulties encountered in organizing departmental audit and various auditing methods, from topic review to the use of key indicators and adverse patient events. GEPID is described, and methods of data collection are discussed. Critical incident reporting is barely mentioned, as is the interface with risk management. It is interesting to make comparisons of audit across specialties, and in this context, most specialties involve sampling of notes and cases, which does not seem to feature in anaesthetic audit.

In summary, this small book acts as a good practical manual of audit methods for those involved in hospital audits and gives an overview of the framework that has been created nationally for medical audit.

A. G. H. Cole


This handbook is the first product of the International Association for the Study of Pain Task Force on Acute Pain. The Task Force, chaired by Dr L. Brian Ready, is mainly American, with some representation from Europe and Australia. This is a slim book (unfortunately A4 sized) of 70 pages, which aims to provide practical bedside information for those treating patients with acute pain. It is not intended to be a comprehensive stand-alone book on techniques or a review of the growing literature on Acute Pain Management. The views expressed are those of the members of the Task Force and references are limited.

There are six chapters, covering the mechanisms of acute pain, the pharmacology of opioids, local analgesic drugs and NSAID, adult and paediatric postoperative pain and the management of trauma and burns-related pain. Many readers will consider the book because of their interest in adult postoperative pain—fortunately there are only 24 pages on this topic.

The strength of this book, however, lies in the overview of the subject, the coverage of areas such as acutely painful medical conditions and acute cancer pain and the abundance of flow diagrams, tables and lists throughout the book. Errors in dosages have crept in, however; for example, the infusion dose of morphine for neonates is given as 10 mg kg⁻¹ h⁻¹.

This is a very useful publication designed to be used as a companion to the U.S. Departments of Health Clinical Guidelines on Acute Pain Management. Between them, they offer a very practical guide to the subject. It is a pity that both are not designed to fit in a white coat pocket.

R. G. Wheasley