THE LIPPINCOTT INTERACTIVE ANESTHESIA LIBRARY ON CD-ROM, VERSION 3.0

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A constant query from students and residents is: “What should I read?” The common retort from clinicians, teachers, and mentors is “everything.” Good medical-dental reference texts are expensive, voluminous, continually updated, and difficult to access outside of a library, study, or office, but they are the scientific and clinical frameworks that create the foundation of any specialty. Anesthesiology is unique in that much of the fundamental knowledge base encompasses many of the medical specialties and basic sciences. Anesthesia providers read widely, and the amount of reference material is staggering. Every novice anesthesia provider slowly begins to assemble his or her version of the complete anesthesia reference library to reflect his or her practice. This library becomes too large to fit in a locker and more often than not gathers dust because it is not readily accessible or because it is incomplete. Consulting reference texts is an integral part of any well-grounded practice. Referring, refreshing, and updating to reference sources is not a sign of weakness but one of intellectual and clinical honesty.

The Lippincott Interactive Anesthesia Library on CD-ROM is one in a series of attempts by publishers to compile a comprehensive, high-quality library on a specific subject for the student and practitioner, combining the speed and power of computer retrieval with a selection of classic texts. The ability to use a laptop computer makes this library concept unique in its portability. This single CD-ROM provides access to the complete contents of the latest editions of the following texts:

- Clinical Anesthesia, 4th edition, Barash, Cullen, Stoelting
- Handbook of Clinical Anesthesia, 4th edition, Barash, Cullen, Stoelting
- Neural Blockade, 3rd edition, Cousins and Bridenbaugh
- Pharmacology and Physiology in Anesthetic Practice, Stoelting
- Review of Clinical Anesthesia, 3rd edition, Connelly and Silverman
- Anesthesiology: Problem-Oriented Patient Management, 4th edition, Yao
- Textbook of Internal Medicine, Kelley

In the digital age, “content is king,” and as a result, there has been a concentration in medical-dental publishing with fewer companies controlling more and more of the market. This gives them the ability to dominate medical-dental specialties because of their comprehensive lists of publications. It allows for integrated products such as this CD-ROM but also limits access and viability of other useful texts because of ownership and copyright arrangements. If given the freedom, would I choose a different subset of texts to include in my digital library? Of course! In the perfect world, one could pick and choose among all available texts from all publishers and create a truly personal digital library. This potential may not be as far in the future as it seems.

The Lippincott Interactive Anesthesia Library 3.0 on CD-ROM is a browser-based program that allows basic navigation via a Tree of Contents. Navigating through a topic, viewing figures and tables either within the topic or at the end of each chapter, is intuitive and easy. A print feature allows printing of materials for classroom or personal use, and a bookmark feature allows creation of placeholders for selected topics. It is the Search feature, however, that harnesses the power of the personal computer and makes this an exciting and useful product. One can search instantly across all the texts, from a subset of the books, or from one single book for the information desired. An unbelievable amount of material is immediately, easily, and rapidly accessible. The user interface is simple, and technical support is excellent through an on-line help system, telephone, or e-mail. This collection is not inexpensive, but neither are the hard copy versions of the books. Institutional and network pricing are available to lower the cost per unit.

A testing module, Review of Clinical Anesthesia, an interactive quiz containing a database of more than 1000 questions, is also included in the program. These quizzes can be manipulated to create individualized tests on specific topics. This feature could be useful for students preparing for all types of examinations, for providers studying for recertification, and for all lifelong learners as a vehicle for self-assessment and review.

Two interesting additions to the program will serve to whet the appetite for the possibilities and promise of advanced digital technology. The first is a half hour of supplemental video clips of procedures such as basic
and advanced airway maneuvers, transesophageal echocardiography, and regional anesthesia techniques performed in real time hyperlinked to relevant portions of the text. Of great interest to the novice and experienced clinician is the inclusion of a limited portion of a vigorous and interactive anesthesia simulator—BreathSim Lite®. Combining video and mathematical modeling with real-time user interaction, this sample covering aspects of capnography is an excellent introduction into simulation technology in anesthesia education.

I recommend this product to anyone with an interest in anesthesia, from students at all levels of training to the most experienced clinicians, and believe that it will prove to be a valuable addition to any personal or departmental library. It responds to the age-old command, "look it up," in a positive and worthwhile exercise.

For those of us not born into the digital age, there is still something comforting about the heft of a large book, the feel of glossy paper, the ability to run one's finger down the index, seeking that elusive key word and taking off on a tangent by discovering another area of interest, and the indescribable aroma emanating from opening a dusty volume. Studying a book for hours can leave an almost indelible footprint on the mind, and years later, some can reflect and picture that chart in the upper right-hand corner. A compact, CD-ROM jewel case does not give the same sensory pleasure as the look and feel of bound volumes on the shelf, but the power, speed, potential affordability, portability, connectivity, and utility of digital technology are part of the information revolution engulfing and permanently changing all aspects of our personal and professional lives.

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