Interactive Cardiac Surgery

PAVEL ZACEK, JAN DOMINIK, PAVEL KUBIS

EXTENT P/H	DVD
PRICE/ISBN	£54.00 3540238255
PUBLISHER	Springer (Berlin), 2005
REVIEWER	Colin Hilton
STAR RATING	**

This DVD is an interactive textbook of cardiac surgery in that navigating through the book is, like all textbooks, at the whim of and under the control of the reader. It has been produced in the Czech Republic and I think it has been translated from a Czech text. The language is somewhat stilted and some of the terms used seem to be direct translations from the Czech and, as such, read awkwardly. Some of the words do not exist in the English language.

It is unclear at whom it is aimed. The written text is brief and limited in its scope. There are links from the text to more detailed sections on the major aspects of cardiac surgery but even these are superficial and would not be useful to cardiac surgical trainees beyond the first year or two of their training. It may, however, be useful as a review for trainees, nurses and students who wish to gain a superficial knowledge of the subject prior to more advanced training.

The format of the DVD is an index page from which specific topics can be accessed. Topics are cross-referenced so that, for instance, while reviewing valve disease, pictures of the pathological appearance of the valve can be accessed along with basic physiology, anatomy and surgical details. The graphics and text are clear and easy to read. Indeed, the graphics and illustrations on the DVD are its greatest strength. Unfortunately, even there it has weaknesses. The labelling of diagrams is generally satisfactory but the video clips of echocardiograms and angiograms and most of the X-rays have no direct labels. There are descriptions but I feel these often need some prior knowledge before the viewer could identify the features described. Although sound could usefully have been added, the only use of this is the sound of a heartbeat over the main titles.

The text on each topic is divided into several sections, such as diagnosis, operations and results. This includes links to a history of the topic – a simple list of notable developments without graphics – which is by no means comprehensive. There could have been much more done with this section, especially as there are no references related to this information. Within the texts, certain words are underlined as if to provide either emphasis or a link to further information. Often they provide neither.

While there are links in the text to other related subjects, there are no links to the list of references provided from the front page. Indeed, the references are a great disappointment as they are all references to textbooks, the most recent

of which is already 5 years' old. There is no mention, for instance, of international guidelines on valve replacement which would have provided considerable information in the section on why and when to replace the aortic valve.

The operative pictures are generally excellent although the descriptions of the techniques are limited. They are insufficient to act as a guide for the trainee faced with a surgical patient.

Results of surgical procedures are dealt with very briefly if at all and, again, have no references to the seminal literature. There is no reference, for instance, in the chapter on heart transplantation to the International Society for Heart and Lung Transplantation database from which some of the information must have come.

Histology is another area where the content falls short of what I would expect from a textbook. Under cardiac tumours, there are no pictures of the histology of myxoma which by the authors' own statement accounts for 75% of cardiac tumours. There are no slides of pericarditis but epicarditis – very rare, as the authors admit – is represented.

I was disappointed in this DVD. I believe it could have been a very useful tool for trainees, particularly its visual aspects. While these are well done, it is seriously let down by the superficial nature of the information provided. The lack of references to the literature is also very disappointing as it cannot be used as a basis for further research into a topic. I do hope, however, that the authors will produce a second edition to address some of these points as I think such projects could have a very useful educational role.

ABC of Alcohol (4th edn)

ALEX PATON, ROBIN TOUQUET

EXTENT P/H	72 p, paperback
PRICE/ISBN	£18.95 0727918141
PUBLISHER	Blackwell (Oxford), 2005
REVIEWER	Kieran Moriarty
STAR RATING	*****

This classic is a tribute to the long-standing dedication of physician Alex Paton. He introduces co-editor, Professor Robin Touquet, who has pioneered the treatment of alcohol misuse in Accident & Emergency at St Mary's Hospital in London.

Expert contributors ensure a true multidisciplinary approach. Although essentially a primer to alcohol, the book's length has virtually doubled to 57 pages. Interestingly, while the previous front cover shows a young male drinking, this fourth edition silhouettes what could be either a young man or a woman. Their wine glass clearly exceeds one unit, reflecting concern about binge drinking in young adults.

Concepts are clearly defined and will inform health professionals, lay people and government, hopefully enhancing confidence in tackling alcohol misuse.

Eric Appleby of Alcohol Concern highlights changing patterns of consumption, the powerful advertising lobby and binge drinking, particularly in young women and northern regions. The protective effects of alcohol in coronary heart and cerebrovascular disease are soon overtaken by all-cause mortality, when people exceed sensible recommendations.

Successive governments have been ambivalent since alcohol generates taxes and employment. Hence, the National Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy was delayed until 2004. Little wonder, since ten different government departments have an interest in alcohol policy with many in direct conflict.

Paton describes absorption, metabolism, distribution and tolerance to alcohol and explains why women are more susceptible than men. Apparently, on average, six people are affected by each problem drinker. Genetic, familial, constitutional and environmental factors influence drinking patterns. Alcohol misuse is also often missed in older people.

The Paddington Alcohol Test is a 1-min questionnaire for recognising alcohol misuse in A&E. Touquet describes the 'teachable moment', that window when the patient may be amenable to a brief intervention. He references the excellent Royal College of Physicians' report *Alcohol, can the NHS afford it? – Recommendations for a coherent alcohol strategy for hospitals*. Touquet highlights the recognition of Wernicke's encephalopathy and its prompt treatment with intravenous Pabrinex.

Paton tables the litany of medical conditions associated with heavy drinking, and surgical problems, especially trauma, are highlighted. People who drink more than eight units per day have a 3-fold higher risk of postoperative morbidity, considerably reduced by pre-operative abstinence.

John Henry gives a practical guide to interactions between alcohol and drugs, both legal and illicit, while Geoffrey Smerdon describes alcohol misuse in primary care. A GP can appreciate the perspective of the whole family. Currently, 98% of excessive drinkers who visit GPs' surgeries are not identified; sadly, the specification for essential services under the new General Medical Services Contract omits alcohol.

Bruce Ritson succinctly reviews advice and counselling, treatment and resources. Two-thirds of excessive drinkers respond well to treatment, the long-term prognosis being surprisingly good with relapses forming part of recovery. Brief intervention should be offered when hazardous or harmful drinking is first identified. This comprises ten minutes' discussion and explanation, provision of a self-help booklet, and offering a further appointment in one or two weeks. He describes shared care, particularly with alcohol specialist nurses in hospital or the community, awareness of specialist services and the tremendous contribution of Alcoholics Anonymous, Al-Anon and Alateen.

The illustrations and graphs, bullet points, boxes and index are excellent. I strongly recommend this book, both professionally and personally, especially to all alcohol healthcare professionals, hospital doctors, particularly A&E staff, students, lay people interested in alcohol, including politicians and Department of Health strategists.

ABC of Alcohol, fourth edition, brings the subject right up to date. In 1994, I bought three copies of the third edition to loan to junior doctors and students writing articles or projects. Only one copy survives. I will not be lending my fourth edition to anybody!

Skills for Communicating with Patients (2nd edn)

JONATHAN SILVERMAN, SUZANNE KURTZ, JULIET DRAPER

EXTENT P/H	262 p, paperback
PRICE/ISBN	£27.95 1857756401
PUBLISHER	Radcliffe (Oxford), 2004
REVIEWER	Malcolm Puntis
STAR RATING	****

Will any of us admit that our communication skills are below par? Could we take a better history? Could we help patients to better understand and participate in their treatment? Will this book, now in its second edition, help practising surgeons to improve their communication skills and hopefully help to avoid complaints and litigation, so many of which stem from misunderstanding?

In the first chapter, 'Defining what to teach and learn: an overview of the communication skills curriculum', the style is such that I was not sure if this book was going to be a manual for teachers and organisers of courses or an instruction book for students. Helpfully, in the introduction the authors ask: 'Who is the intended audience?' The reply they give includes learners at all levels of education, facilitators and programme directors, medical educators, medical education administrators, funding agencies and medical politicians. In fact, just about everybody and, having read the remaining seven chapters, I agree with them and suggest that there are very few of us who could not benefit from a diligent reading of this book.

A stylistic irritation stems from its joint Canadian and English authorship. The authors try to fend off any criticism in this area with another useful question in the introduction: 'How have we addressed style issues in a book intended for the European, North American and wider international market?' Indeed, there is a little glossary to explain, for example, that they use the term 'specialist' rather than 'consultant' and 'resident' rather than 'registrar'. Nevertheless, in a book concerned with clarity of communication, this is somewhat irksome.