would seem to be superior and, in this particular case, there is no suggestion that the patient is unfit, or indeed requested a local anaesthetic repair. The fact that intra-operative swabs are not placed within any body cavity during a laparoscopic hernia repair means that this feared complication of a retained swab cannot occur. Is this yet another advantage of having a laparoscopic repair?

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AUTHORS' RESPONSE

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We note the recent comment regarding our short report is entitled 'Another advantage of the laparoscopic approach'. We do not feel that this is true and, indeed, more up-to-date references^{1–5} than they quote do not support their anxieties regarding repairs under a local anaesthetic as supposed to the benefits of a laparoscopic repair. Furthermore, the correspondents miss the point regarding the clearly demonstrated value of pre-emptive analgesia. The jury is still out!⁶

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BOOK REVIEW

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Alarm Bells in Medicine: Danger Symptoms in Medicine, Surgery and Clinical Specialties

NADEEM ALI

EXTENT P/H	192 p, paperback
PRICE/ISBN	£19.95 0727918192
PUBLISHER	BMJ Publishing (London), 2004
REVIEWER	Andrew Edwards
STAR RATING	****

This book presents the reader with an overview of symptoms in medicine and surgery that should alert them to a possible underlying serious condition. The editor has been able to draw on the experience of a wide range of world-wide contributors, all renowned experts in their own individual fields. What makes this book unique is that there are no references as such; acknowledgement of each contribution is indicated at the beginning of each section.

There are no chapters in the book, only sections attributed to each individual subject. They are listed alphabetically from breast surgery through to vascular surgery. At the beginning of each section there is a list of the ten top 'alarm bells' for each subject. The following pages expand on these in more detail, giving the salient features of each symptom and a recommended course of action.

The individual specialties identified are comprehensive. However, I feel that radiology and pharmacology could have been included as well. Each of the authorities in their field has given a list of the top ten symptoms, which no doubt will cause disagreement within their own area, but I feel that each specialty has covered the more important and potentially serious symptoms very well. The action for each symptom follows a familiar line but also the degree of urgency and some interim advice is also given for each symptom. On the whole, there is no ambiguity as regards a diagnosis for a presenting symptom; therefore, the reader is left in no doubt as to the course of action to be taken.

The layout of the book and uniformity of the text make it easy to use. It is concise and very easy to retrieve information due to the alphabetical listing. There are no illustrations to accompany the text; this may add to the impact value but it does not detract from the purpose of this book. As mentioned, there are no references, only a list of distinguished authors of textbooks in their own specialty.

In summary, this is a valuable and well-edited collection of potentially serious specialty-specific symptoms. It is highly informative and should alert the reader to the 'alarm bells' that may present in their clinical practice. The book should prove a valuable asset to the library of anyone involved in the practice of medicine including medical students, GPs and hospital doctors.