Farquharson's Textbook of Operative General Surgery (9th edn)

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EXTENT P/H	608 p, hardback
PRICE/ISBN	£99.00 0340814985
PUBLISHER	Hodder Arnold (London), 2005
REVIEWER	Matthew Miller
STAR RATING	****

This well-established, classic textbook addresses the needs of trainees for a wide-ranging and detailed guide to the breadth of operations that are still covered by the specialty known as general surgery. It also manages to include operative situations that could present unexpectedly to a general surgeon working in a rural area or overseas with limited referral resources. As such, it achieves the aim as set out in the preface.

With the increasing subspecialisation of practice within the UK, this has necessitated a multi-author approach. All the contributors are practising clinicians in their fields within the UK and Ireland. This works well, with little duplication and a consistency of style that is easy to follow. The interspersed line drawings and diagrams that illustrate the text are clear and informative. Operations are clearly described with alternatives and variations of approach. The references given at the end of each chapter are kept to a practical level for those seeking greater depth of discussion. They include seminal papers, editorials and reviews. That this is achieved within just over 560 pages and 650 diagrams is remarkable.

However, there are imminent changes to the education of surgical trainees in the UK. These are likely to result in more narrowly focused UK 'general surgeons' of the future, with a much more limited repertoire of operative procedures, accustomed to working in large teams and rarely straying outside their defined competencies. How much this and similar textbooks catering to the breadth of surgery will appeal to them is uncertain.

The book does not purport to be a subspecialist text, nor does it try to reference the evidence base for all that it describes. For UK practice, I would have expected to see a greater emphasis on the anticipation of complications particular to operations and related issues of consent. The book purposely does not address the areas of non-operative management or wider decision making around conditions. Nor does it cover operating theatre safety, communication and team-working (an area that will be indispensable in the future).

Overall, this textbook of operative surgery is an excellent place to begin for the surgeon starting out to acquire the skills needed for modern surgical practice, as well as for the trainee approaching the intercollegiate part 3 examination. For anyone at any level anticipating a period abroad operating in a resource-deprived area, this is the textbook of choice.

Learning from Medical Errors: Legal Issues

ANH NGUYEN, DUNG NGUYEN

EXTENT P/H	248 p, paperback
PRICE/ISBN	£40.00 185775767X
PUBLISHER	Radcliffe (Oxford), 2005
REVIEWER	Tony Giddings
STAR RATING	**

Learning from Medical Errors: Clinical Problems

ANH NGUYEN, DUNG NGUYEN

EXTENT P/H	240 p, paperback
PRICE/ISBN	£40.00 1857757688
PUBLISHER	Radcliffe (Oxford), 2005
REVIEWER	Tony Giddings
STAR RATING	**

These two books tell a remarkable series of stories. The first is the authors' own. Dr Anh Nguyen and his elder brother Dung Nguyen were born in Saigon, Vietnam, and grew up in Florida. Both graduated in engineering and then medicine and have been in clinical practice in the US for a decade, collecting a vast anthology from their own and others' practice.

With multiple true-life examples, the clinical pitfalls and legal challenges that confront us are graphically shown. They emphasise the value of these parables so that we can avoid, trap and mitigate our errors. Each book runs to over 200 pages in which hundreds of cautionary tales are separated by the authors' commentary and advice. Much is the reiteration of sound clinical principles and a useful reminder of what we all should know.

The stories certainly help to dramatise and motivate our learning and the chapters are a series of practical tips, for example, 'what you should not place in a progress note' (legal issues) and 'low back pain' (clinical problems). Those looking for proof of the adage that 'if it can go wrong it will' are sure to find these volumes a handy reference to prove their point.

The books have much to commend them and they can be sampled very conveniently to research a particular problem; however, for the reviewer who feels duty-bound to read them from end to end, they present a serious challenge. Simply put, they are difficult to read. At first, I felt my pedantic English criticism was the cause of the discomfort, seasoned as it was with a traditional dislike of defensive medical practice. The profligate use of investigations and the aggressive, litigious atmosphere which pervades some