BOOK REVIEWS

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Handbook of General Surgical Emergencies

SAM MEHTA, ANDREW HINDMARSH, LEILA REES

EXTENT P/H	280 pages, Paperback
PRICE/ISBN	£24.95, 1857757467
PUBLISHER	Radcliffe (Oxford), 2006
REVIEWER	Rory Molloy
STAR RATING	****

The authors state that the aim of this book is to provide a pocket-sized resource for medical students and professionals working in the accident and emergency department or in surgical admission units. The book is divided into 11 chapters, the first four dealing with general principles – how to break bad news, issues surrounding consent, *etc.* The following six chapters deal with commonly presenting emergencies based on systems. The final chapter covers important paediatric surgical emergencies.

The text is clear, succinct and mostly laid out in a manner that would make quick reference in an emergency easy to find and follow. As the authors state, it is not designed to be an exhaustive analysis of every presenting condition. Rather, it acts as an aide-memoire when faced with unfamiliar circumstances. It also provides a reminder of important first principles to follow and appropriate investigations to undertake in various scenarios.

I especially liked the sections dealing with generic skills such as communication with patients and relatives, consent and breaking bad news. These issues, while not strictly emergencies, are encountered almost on a daily basis and can be extremely challenging. The guidance provided should assist in ensuring that correct procedures are followed. References are provided to enable readers to consult the latest updates from the relevant authorities.

Criticism of this book could be directed at the omission of a section dealing with management of the compromised airway. While uncommon and usually dealt with by other specialities, all surgical trainees should have sound knowledge of how to deal with airway obstruction and how to secure an airway in an emergency. Another minor issue is the physical size of the book, which does not lend itself to be carried by the busy junior doctor, especially now that white coats have almost disappeared from the wards.

However, a brief summary of the diagnosis, investigation and management of common surgical emergencies is presented. The information is not exhaustive but the brevity ensures that important points should not be overlooked. This will be of great benefit to junior doctors coping with emergencies early in their career. Medical students who are increasingly faced with large volumes of information to assimilate will also welcome this practical and to-the-point blueprint. It assumes a basic knowledge and does not purport to replace standard

textbooks. As such, it will find a useful place in the armamentarium of medical students revising for examinations. Busy junior doctors will also welcome the clear and concise layout.

The Evolution of Surgical Instruments

JOHN KIRKUP

EXTENT P/H	507 pages, Hardback
PRICE/ISBN	US\$275.00, 0930405862
PUBLISHER	Norman Publishing (California), 2006
REVIEWER	Barry Jackson
STAR RATING	*****

It is rare to find a neglected subject in the history of medicine. Almost every aspect has been subject to repeated detailed scrutiny and recording by amateur historians and professionals alike, resulting in a plethora of articles, monographs and books. Although individual types of surgical instruments have occasionally been the subject of historical research and publication, this magisterial book is the first to give a detailed overview of the entire history of surgical instrumentation. In the English literature, only one book has previously attempted this. In 1942, CJS Thompson, then curator at The Royal College of Surgeons of England, published a short history of surgical instruments in a pocket-sized book of only 115 pages, many of which were taken up by illustrations. It was inevitably superficial. Now, his successor as curator of surgical instruments at the College, John Kirkup, a retired orthopaedic surgeon, has produced what must surely be the definitive work on the subject. It is difficult to believe that it will ever be surpassed.

The work is in four parts. Part 1 gives a general introduction but is largely taken up with a description of the sources used in compiling the information to follow. These include not only a very large number of historical articles and books on surgery but also a study of surgical instrument makers' catalogues over the past 200 years and, not surprisingly, the very large collection of instruments owned by the College as well as collections in other museums in Europe and the US.

Part 2 comprises nearly 100 pages describing the different metals and other materials that have been used to make instruments over the centuries. These include animal parts such as bone and ivory, plants, stones, minerals, rubber, plastic, gum elastic as well as no less than 13 different non-ferrous metals and six ferrous metals.

Part 3 is the perhaps the core of the book and is titled 'Structure and Form'. It has ten chapters dealing in great detail with the evolution of different classes of instrument. Probes, needles, blades, forceps, retractors, scissors, catheters, haemostats, dilators and their various allies as well as implants and prostheses, diagnostic and therapeutic instruments – the list goes on. Each chapter comprises a historical introduction