Book Reviews

Open Heart: The Radical Surgeons Who Revolutionized Medicine

DAVID KC COOPER

EXTENT P/H 431 pages, Hardback
PRICE/ISBN £26.99 9781607144908
PUBLISHER Kaplan (New York), 2010
REVIEWER Steve Livesey
STAR RATING ★★★★★

It is nearly thirty years since my first exposure to cardiac surgery and in truth not much has changed since then. Of course we operate on more patients with more co-morbidities and we are undoubtedly producing better outcomes for patients requiring routine cardiac surgery but what we do and the way we do it has not changed fundamentally since then.

In this fascinating book, David KC Cooper describes the events and the people who shaped them in the years before I was captivated by seeing the beating human heart. The events he describes are as cataclysmic as any in medicine – and they all occurred in the same medical specialty in a relatively short period of time. He has managed to capture what it must have felt like to have been involved through a series of anecdotal descriptions of the major developments in cardiac surgery; where possible he has interviewed the main characters; where not he has set the historical context by including library material.

His style will not be to everyone's taste for at times it is very anecdotal. To his credit he tackles the issue of Christian Barnard stealing a march on his mentor, Norman Shumway, in performing the first human heart transplant, with a sensitivity that shows his admiration for them both. This book will certainly appeal to anyone with an interest in cardiac surgery but it also deserves to reach a larger audience. Those with an interest in medical history will welcome this book and where some technical knowledge is required, good explanations are given in language the interested layperson would understand.

The intellect, skill, determination and bravery of those involved is clearly demonstrated in Cooper's text but one cannot help but wonder how many of these pioneers, many of them rightly deserving the description 'maverick', would have thrived in today's increasingly regulated and stifling environment.

Hunt & Marshall's Clinical Problems in Surgery

JULIAN A SMITH, JANE G FOX, ALAN C SAUNDER, MING KON YII

EXTENT P/H 608 pages, Paperback
PRICE/ISBN £65.99 9780729538268
PUBLISHER Elsevier (London), 2010
REVIEWER Sophie Pilkington
STAR RATING ★★★★★

This precise and thorough textbook provides a fresh insight into problem-based learning. An integrated approach is presented that allows the development of an organised and logical system for solving clinical problems encountered by patients. The informative text encourages the reader to acquire a focused history, complete a detailed physical examination and then develop a differential diagnosis and relevant management plan. Such a problem-orientated clinical approach is invaluable for the inexperienced and is recommended for anyone preparing for examinations at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

The book is organised into nine chapters, which cover regional problems such as abdomen and gut problems, limb problems and urogenital problems. An additional four chapters are devoted to more general aspects of surgery including common medical problems in surgical patients, post-operative problems, intensive care and trauma. A broad range of topics is covered in an accurate and up-to-date manner. The text is well written and easy to read.

Each chapter focuses on the problem presented by the patient and then describes the clinical reasoning necessary for diagnosis and formulating a tailored treatment pathway. Pattern recognition of common surgical diseases is presented in a succinct and easily learnt style with useful tables and diagrams. There are no colour photographs but the black and white photographs and radiographs complement the text. Many line diagrams are included and these are simple and informative. The book also includes valuable advice on recording progress notes, reviewing unwell patients, writing discharge summaries and presenting case histories.

The appeal of this book is broad and it will be useful to medical students and those preparing for postgraduate exams, as well as doctors wishing to refine their clinical surgical skills. The problem-orientated approach is a useful tool and is expertly presented by the authors.