

Book Reviews

Handbook of Antibiotics, 2nd edn. RICHARD E. REESE & ROBERT F. BETTS. Pp. 655. Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone; 1993. £22.50. ISBN 0 316 73719 4.

According to the preface, this pocket-sized book is intended for (among others) 'medical students, house officers, practising physicians, pharmacists'. Spawned from the antibiotics section of *A Practical Approach to Infectious Diseases*, there are two ways of using the book. Firstly as a ready source of detailed information about antibiotics and their use – a *vade mecum*, and secondly as an *aide-mémoire* for prescribing. It is outwardly didactic in format, yet manages to present all sides of the arguments for and against a specific agent in a specific situation. Having presented their case, the authors come off the fence, and using the phrases in bold type such as 'We would...' or 'We would not...' give the reader the benefit of their generally sound advice.

The format certainly allows speed of access to the data. The first chapter covers the principles of antimicrobial chemotherapy, and is essential reading for all who prescribe these drugs. No philosophical surprises for the medical microbiologist or infectious diseases physician, but nice to see it written down by someone else. Reference to comparative costs will be an eye opener for some. Subsequent chapters deal with each of the major classes of antibiotics. The format is the same, thus assisting the reader to find what he wants easily. After a brief description of the class there follows sections on the spectrum of activity, pharmacokinetics, indications and contraindications for use, preparations available, dosage, monitoring and cost. Even the question of taste is addressed with regard to paediatric suspensions. Special chapters cover the antiviral agents and antifungals (a wide interpretation of the term 'antibiotic'), and specifically the therapy of tuberculosis, pneumocystis and malaria prophylaxis. Each chapter is completed with an up to date and often extensive bibliography, which by way of bonus is annotated. Finally, a series of appendices cover in table form; therapy for bacteraemia, meningitis, adult pneumonia, sexually transmitted diseases, septic arthritis, urinary tract infection in adults, Lyme disease and neonatal dosing.

With such a mine of information, what are the problems? The main drawback is that the book is parochial, and totally North America orientated (well illustrated by the almost exclusive reference to North American literature). The UK reader will seek in vain for information on flucloxacillin or fusidic acid, and will find some familiar new agents dismissed as of little consequence, e.g. teicoplanin. Azlocillin is unavailable whilst mezlocillin is recommended – the reverse of the UK situation. Many instances where ampicillin-sulbactam is recommended simply reflect the non-availability of parenteral co-amoxycylav. In attempting to steer the reader through the confusion of antibiotics, some anomalies of consistency are inevitable when comparing summary tables with text.

Returning to the preface, have they achieved their goal for readers outside North America? There is too much detail for the medical student's needs, and the drugs the house officer wants to prescribe may not be listed, however both groups would benefit from reading the first two chapters. The specialists – microbiologists, infectious disease physicians and pharmacists will find this book invaluable as a rapid reference source, and it is these groups that I strongly advise should buy their own copy.

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HIV Infection: A Clinical Manual, 2nd edn. HOWARD LIBMAN & ROBERT A. WITZBURG. Pp. 574. Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone; 1993. £25.50 (Paperback). ISBN 0 316 51162 5.

This book originated some five years ago as an inhouse guide for resident medical staff at Boston City Hospital. It has developed considerably and now appears as the second edition of a 574 page book.

Unlike other texts with which it competes such as Ma and Armstrong *AIDS and Infections of Homosexual Men* or Sande and Volberding *The Medical Management of AIDS*, this book presents information in a way that is immediately accessible to those people with hands-on contact with their patients. Following a short overview of HIV infection, the book concentrates on the common clinical syndromes with which patients present, such as fever, weight loss or cardiac problems. For each subject there is an overview of published material and then a practical guide to the management of patients with a particular problem. The third section of the book targets specific problems such as toxoplasmosis or Kaposi's sarcoma, and again the sections are practically relevant and contain useful up to date information. The final section of the book is devoted to special topics such as use of antiretroviral therapy and drug-using patient. This particular section of the book reflects the North American East Coast experience and the immediate relevance of much of this part of the book is diminished in the light of practice in the United Kingdom.

The black and white illustrations in general have not reproduced well and many of the chest radiographs rely on the accompanying legend to point out the abnormality. The reference lists with each section are comprehensive and up to date, although in places somewhat partisan and reflect North American literature. I learnt a lot from reading this book and I suspect others involved in the day-to-day care of HIV positive patients will also find it of use. It is competitively priced and I am sure that each unit will want to own its own copy. My only quibble with the book itself is that it is soft-backed and I suspect it will not withstand the ravages of time with constant use in the outpatient clinic or by the bedside.

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