Journal of Radiotherapy in Practice

Journal of Radiotherapy in Practice 2002
3, 51

Book Review

Principles and Practice of Brachytherapy: Using Afterloading Systems

Edited by C. A. F. Joslin, A. Flynn, E. J. Hall

Arnold Publishers; ISBN 0340 74209 7; 576pp; Hardback; £120.00

This seminal text on brachytherapy (using afterloading systems) covers three main areas:

- The physics of brachytherapy.
- The radiobiology of brachytherapy.
- Clinical practice.

The preface acknowledges the necessity for a team approach to brachytherapy, modelling the multidisciplinary approach in teletherapy. Key professionals within the brachytherapy team include: clinical oncologists; nursing staff; brachytherapy technicians/source technicians; physicists; imaging radiographers and radiotherapists (therapy radiographers). However this book is principally aimed at trainee clinical oncologists. Although, there is an acknowledgement that the text will also allow those oncologists experienced in brachytherapy to update their knowledge in the field.

The three main themes of the book cover many of the aspects pertinent to undergraduate radiotherapist (therapy radiographers) training. While the physics equations within the initial chapters may put some undergraduate radiotherapists off, this section provides an ideal review of the sources used and their production, principals of source specification and systems of dosimetry. While the text may be too detailed for many undergraduate therapists those students with an interest in physics would find this engaging. Moreover for advanced practitioners looking to specialise in this field or those working towards Consultant practitioner status this text is invaluable.

The section on the clinical aspects of brachytherapy encompasses a wide range of tumour sites and technical approaches. This section is particularly useful for undergraduate radiotherapists as it identifies the indications for brachytherapy, pre-treatment work up, technical approach, and outcomes of treatment. While a structured approach to the layout of the chapters has been attempted, the style and approach is influenced by the individuality of the chapter authors. Hence, the extent to which patient care issues are covered varies from chapter to chapter.

Quality assurance issues are covered throughout the book. Specifically within the final section clinical aspects of quality and safe practice are covered in some detail by authors who have many years of experience of brachytherapy. These chapters provide excellent reference for undergraduate and postgraduate radiotherapists for definition of good practice.

Overall this book provides an extensive coverage of the key principles and applications of afterloaded brachytherapy in the current context of health care delivery. In addition to the scientific principles and the technical aspects this text introduces the reader to the issues of economic evaluation, enabling the reader to assess the impact of brachytherapy in terms of costs.

Brachytherapy is often a difficult subject for undergraduate radiotherapists, and is often perceived as a less attractive option for specialisation than the high energy external beam alternatives. However, this text reviews the range of current treatment approaches in brachytherapy afterloading and would be an asset to those wishing to specialise in this field or those who teach this topic to undergraduate radiotherapists.

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