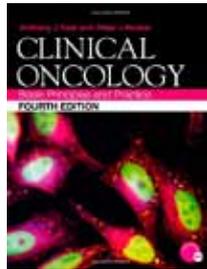


Book Reviews

'CLINICAL ONCOLOGY – BASIC PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE', 4TH EDITION,

Anthony J. Neal, Peter J. Hoskin. Hodder Arnold. April 2009. Paperback 402 pp. £24.99. ISBN 987-0-34097-293-9



The authors' motivation for writing a scientific text book is often around the academic rigour of setting out the science of their specialist area for the benefit of novices entering their scientific specialty. The motivation of the publisher is more complex since selling copies is a pre-requisite to a successful book. Therefore the preface of such books often envisages a wide readership of interested professionals in associated fields of interest. This book carries the subtitle 'Basic Principles and Practice' and in its preface the authors suggest that it will be of interest and relevance to undergraduates in medicine, junior doctors and to nurses and other health professionals with an interest in oncology.

It is undoubtedly attractive to read although the page is intensively used with tight margins and a dearth of restful open spaces. The layout is clear, but with a slightly idiosyncratic use of pink text for headings within the text and on the top margin of each page. The illustrations are truly fascinating with high quality images of a striking range of clinical and radiological cases and signs. The text is interspersed with self assessment questions and with clinical vignettes which add variety to the learning experience. One minor quibble is that many of the subject areas would benefit from more liberal use of tables and diagrams to illustrate and clarify points in the text.

The first six chapters cover the general principles of a range of oncology disciplines. This is followed by fifteen disease specific chapters and a chapter each on Oncological Emergencies and Palliative Care to complete the volume. The range of subject matter is well chosen and the depth of coverage is uniform, which is a benefit of having only authors. The text is quite authoritative and both authors are senior academics in UK clinical Oncology.

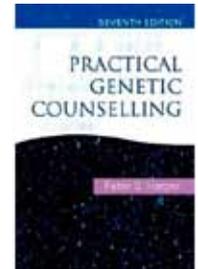
The book is well-written and this is an approachable primer for individuals wishing to study the subject or a particular disease site in more detail. As such it would be of interest to oncology trainees as a basic text for their early training but would not be sufficient for the more advanced trainees or Sub-Specialist Consultants. As discussed above, the preface also suggests that this text book would be of interest to Undergraduates, nurses with a specialist interest and Physicians and Surgeons in other specialities wishing to have a grounding in the oncological principles. This text book would be very suitable for gaining a basic knowledge of the specialty and should be on the library shelf for these groups. However, it may lack the detail required by a Consultant in a linked speciality. For example, I do not think that a Respiratory Physician with a interest in lung cancer would

be satisfied with the level of information provided about chemotherapy in lung cancer, but would find this text book useful in setting out the basic principles, supplemented by published expert reviews and peer-reviewed articles.

In summary, I would recommend this book as the authoritative primer in clinical oncology which sets out the scientific basis and rationale for clinical practice in the United Kingdom and it would provide Clinical Oncology trainees with a sound basis for future studies.

PRACTICAL GENETIC COUNSELLING (SEVENTH EDITION)

Peter S Harper. Hodder Arnold. August 2010. Paperback, 407pp. £39.99. ISBN: 978-0-340-99069-8.



When I started my training in clinical genetics in the 1980's, Professor (now Sir) Peter Harper was one of the leading influences. His textbook, at that stage in its second edition, was 'The' guide to genetic counselling, and I remember purchasing the third edition in 1988, hot off the press. This edition has not changed in the tried and tested format of three sections – Part 1 provides an excellent overview of 'general aspects of genetic counselling', Part 2 gives details of 'specific organ systems', and Part 3 details the 'wider picture', and also includes an excellent appendix and glossary of terms. Although I am now supposed to be an 'expert', I occasionally refer to the 6th edition in my bookshelf to check some facts and approaches, and suspect I will do the same with this book if my colleagues haven't pinched it off my bookshelf to do the same. This text is not geared for genetic specialists however, and the generalist, GP or specialist nurse will all find this book the equivalent of the experienced hand on their shoulder, helping guide their consultation smoothly through the usual can of worms that hereditary conditions usually have.

The book's strength is in the title. It deals with genetic counselling – the approach that health specialists should take when dealing with families with hereditary disorders. The first part of the book should prove extremely useful in setting the context of counselling for those in medicine, nursing and other health specialties where genetic information is increasingly creeping into their practice, and who are unsure about the approach they should take. The experience of Harper's lifetime skills in counselling comes through the pages clearly. General practitioners who think they have the scientific facts at their fingertips, might find a copy in their practice library a useful tool in helping tailor their (and their trainees) approach to dealing with the complex web of interactions that initiating genetic referrals on families usually reveals, and help shorten the gap between theoretical knowledge and practice at the coal face of the consulting room.

The sections on individual systems has particularly helpful chapters on neurological disorders, hearing loss, skin and eye, and reflects Harper's personal interest in Myotonic dystrophy and Huntington disease, and his invaluable experience from years of counselling in genetic clinics comes through.

Harper mentions in the preface that this will be the last edition in this format due to his retirement. Where will the book

go next? I think for the next edition the audience probably needs to be defined. Increasingly generalists and specialists are looking online so a web version might encourage the new web-savvy breed of trainees in all disciplines to take a look. There are weaknesses in the 7th edition in areas outside Harper's personal interests. The chapter on cancer genetics doesn't contain much helpful information and needs considerable revision. – Counsellors looking to find what the BRCA1 gene does will find it limited and recent advances in other cancer genes aren't mentioned – and when the majority of referrals to our own service are cancer, and an increasing number are cardiac genetics, then new co-authors need to be brought in to help the book to survive in the era of instant knowledge.

Overall this book continues to be an excellent and invaluable source of guidance for those starting out on their task of dealing with hereditary disorders, which now involve so many areas of disease.

Patrick J Morrison

THE CHECKLIST MANIFESTO

Atul Gawande, Profile Books Ltd, London 2010, 209 pp, £12.99. ISBN 978 184668 313 8,

What should a cholecystectomy and a Van Halen concert have in common? The answer according to Atul Gawande is a checklist to help get things right. In the 'Checklist Manifesto', Gawande



argues that the volume and complexity of the knowledge required for the safe practice of medicine now far exceeds our ability to properly deliver it. He believes that doctors can learn from other industries such as aviation and construction where checklists have made possible some of the most difficult tasks. He has worked with the WHO to introduce this concept into the world of surgery and has produced a ninety second checklist which reduced deaths and complications by more than one third in eight hospitals around the world-at virtually no cost and for almost any kind of operation.

Van Halen's insistence on having a bowl of M &M's, with the brown ones removed, was not in fact the unreasonable request of an egocentric pop band. This request was carefully submerged in a 90 page document that they provided for venue organisers to ensure the safety of their concerts. If the brown M &M's were still present they knew that the document had not been carefully read and that further safety checks were required which often revealed preventable hazards.

Will Gawande's idea catch on? Keep an eye on the colour of M&M's the surgeons are eating.....

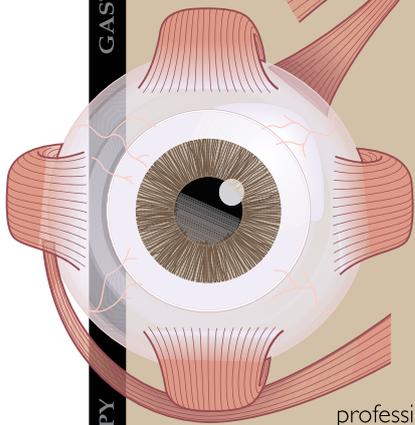
James Clarke

NEUROLOGY ANATOMY PHYSIOLOGY CARDIOLOGY SURGERY ONCOLOGY BIOMEDICINE

GASTROENTEROLOGY

RHEUMATOLOGY

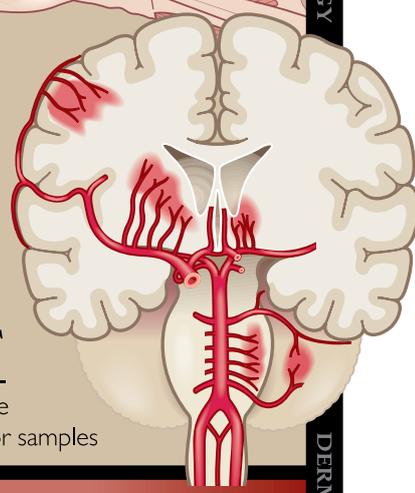
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