

**The Trouble with Medical Journals**

Richard Smith

Royal Society of Medicine Press 2006

Price £19.95. Pp 292

ISBN 1853156736

Richard Smith is an ex-editor (of the *BMJ*) with a mission: to democratise medical publishing. Encouraged by a colleague who told him that he could ‘probably just sit down and write it’, *The Trouble with Medical Journals* is ‘it’.

On the introductory pages, Smith suggests that he is aiming at a wide audience, including anyone ‘currently wondering whether your child should have the [MMR] vaccine’. The blurb on the back is more realistic: ‘an essential read for all those involved in medical publishing’. And it’s all here: what publishers do (make money); what drug companies do (make money and skew the



data); what peer reviewers do (not enough); what editors do (often far too much for no reward); what researchers do (occasionally perpetrate fraud); what readers do (drown in useless information). And ethics underlies everything.

The book reads as Smith lectures: it’s lively, full of anecdote, and he is scrupulously honest. You get the feeling that if you’d had a quick word with him in the corridor one day, you’d get a citation. In some ways, that makes the book a bit unfocused. It does indeed read as if he just sat down and wrote it, which he did during 8 weeks in Venice.

Ironically, an editor might be what Smith himself needed, although he acknowledges help from a number of people who were or are editors. Originally sent to Cambridge University Press, they wanted less of the anecdote, so Smith sent it to the Royal Society of Medicine

Press. The Cambridge University Press book would have been tighter, but I have to admit that it would probably have been less interesting.

As Smith himself admits, it is easier to be critical (and he is – very) than constructive. He also expresses surprise that the book turned out more negative than he expected, but I am not. He puts forward four possible scenarios for medical publishing, named after four characters in the Simpsons: Homer, Marge, Lisa and Bart. I fear that his Bart will be the winner: a world where the big corporations take over, who fund and run the research, and supply what information they want to the practitioners. But as Smith says: the current model is not working well; something has to change and it will. The only question is how it will change, and how quickly. Smith’s time in Venice was not wasted, but perhaps the real future is represented by baby Maggie – a complete unknown.

*Neville Goodman, Southmead Hospital, Bristol*

**Making Sense of Clinical Examination of The Adult Patient: A Hands-on Guide**

Douglas Model

Hodder Arnold 2006

Price £16.99. Pp 298

ISBN 978-0-340-92824-0

This book is a practical compact guide to the clinical examination of the adult patient. It is well presented and comprehensive, covering history taking and clinical examination, but is primarily geared towards medical students at the start of their clinical training. It will, however, also serve as a useful reference book for junior doctors.

Each chapter introduces the examination of each organ system. It starts with basic principles and includes a section on the equipment needed for each system. The assessment sequence has been constructed in a stepwise form and also includes helpful hints on how to elicit signs accurately; for example, how to percuss a patient during a chest examination or using the stethoscope correctly. Useful checklists are provided throughout each section and the chapter concludes with a background section explaining the principles of the clinical signs elicited and their significance.

It has simplistic explanations enabling you to grasp a basic understanding of examining the adult patient. Being reasonably priced (£16.99) and fitting snugly into the pocket of the white coat this book will no doubt prove useful in helping medical students to become competent in clinical examination and history taking.

*Navroop S Johal, Institute of Urology and Institute of Child Health, London*

**Oxford Handbook of Medical Sciences**

Robert Wilkins, Simon Cross,

Ian Megson, David Meredith

Oxford University Press

Price £22.95 Pp 920

ISBN 0198528299

Medical sciences are the building blocks for all medical professions. I can offer testament to that, having ploughed through various chunky texts as a medical student. Having just one book to aid this task is no mean feat.

The authors tackle anatomy, physiology, biochemistry, pathology and pharmacology, presenting these subjects in a very palatable way. Instead of having separate chapters purely dedicated to that branch of science, the book discusses each body

system, along with each section of medical science relating to it.

The authors have obviously trawled the latest information to produce this text. Contained within are priceless little vignettes that even my most senior colleagues were surprised to see and were perhaps unaware of.

One of the most impressive aspects of this book are the diagrams and illustrations. As a practising anaesthetist, some of these would have been invaluable towards the Fellowship of the Royal College of Anaesthetists examination. Had this book been available to me at this stage and at the time of my Membership of the Royal College of Physicians examinations, life would have been much easier!

To summarize, telling a colleague that you have all of these subjects in your pocket will no doubt cause disbelief. With most undergraduate courses now being geared towards the ‘go off and find out’ approach to learning, this book provides the perfect reference. This is an indispensable source for the undergraduate and the postgraduate... spend your pennies now.

*Jonny Wilkinson, Queens Medical Centre, Nottingham*