

Illustrative Handbook of General Surgery

Edited by Herbert Chen
Springer 2010

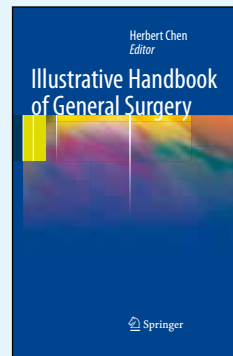
Price £37.99. Pp 343
ISBN 978 1 84882 088 3

This book is billed as a comprehensive, illustrated guide covering all facets of general surgery and is meant to serve as a portable handbook to refresh the trainee before theatre. There are few pockets into which the book would comfortably fit because of its ambitious attempt to cover the surgical journey from patient selection to complications.

The 37 short chapters include descriptions of all major procedures that would be encountered by a general surgical trainee with the exception of paediatrics. There is an emphasis on lower gastrointestinal surgery with a generous section on basic proctology; however, hepatopancreatobiliary, breast, endocrine and hernia surgery are also well covered.

Laparoscopic alternatives are described in the great majority of chapters, often in a rather brief fashion. The chapter format has been standardized to include sub-sections on indications, perioperative considerations, operative technique and postoperative complications. A minority of chapters err from this format and are pictorially led with little supporting text.

Descriptions of the operative procedures, which I would consider to be the main attraction, are clear and well-written, offering greater detail than some of the more established basic texts. The quality of the accompanying images is variable but generally of good quality, providing the reader with a good deal more information than traditional artists' representations. Recommendations for postoperative management tend to be rather conservative from a contempo-



rary UK perspective and there is little reference to the principles of enhanced recovery by the single-institution American authors.

A more concise format might concentrate solely on operative technique and provide more in the way of 'troubleshooting'; something to which almost all such texts aspire to but rarely deliver. The accumulation of more high quality images will improve the content in future editions.

It is a useful book which describes surgical technique well. It would be well thumbed in the junior surgeons' coffee room and is competitively priced. I would certainly consider it in a shortlist but might await further editions before purchasing a personal copy.

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Oxford Handbook of Clinical Medicine (8th edn)

Murray Longmore, Ian B Wilkinson,
Edward H Davidson, Alexander Foulkes,
Ahmad R Mafi

Oxford University Press 2010
Price £24.95. Pp 880
ISBN 978 0 19 923217 8

You realise that the task at hand is going to be difficult when you try to read the book that you are reviewing and actually have difficulty reading it. The font is not miniscule but is small and probably reflects that the audience this book is aimed at is much younger than I. For that reason I have sought the opinions of trainees both at undergraduate and postgraduate level. I (and they) also compared the new edition with a couple of older ones. Remarkably there is significant consensus of opinion in my small poll.

The content of the book remains very valuable although the level of detail in some areas seems to outstrip the ambition to be a handbook rather than a textbook. The major omission from this edition is the blank pages that allowed trainees to make their own notes. All, independently,

thought that this was a retrograde step. The ubiquitous nature of this handbook reflects how useful it has been but I defy you to pick up a well-used one and not find the handwriting of the (sometimes erstwhile) owner. We try to encourage reflective learning – the blank pages helped that.

The colour coding on the side of the book associated with chapters was viewed very positively and the section on emergencies and radiology was thought to be very useful in this small book. It used to be said that it would fit easily into the pocket of the white coat but although the size has not changed the pockets have all disappeared – should the book have something on patient safety in general but infection control in particular when referring to the approach to the patient?

The approach taken in providing information is an interesting combination of symptoms in some sections and signs in others but for the most part it is based around the traditional diagnosis type of presentation. This works well.

Terminology in medicine is often changing and I was interested that the students

who helped to review this book preferred the reference to acute renal failure and chronic renal failure rather than the newer acute kidney injury and chronic kidney disease. These terms are with us, however, and perhaps should have been mentioned.

The aide memoire for practical procedures is a combination of the fairly simple and routine through to procedures that have come under closer scrutiny because of complications in inexperienced hands. The emphasis on competence in procedures before they are attempted is underplayed, I think. It is far more common, even in today's NHS, for competent back up to be available rather than the lone trainee having to trump 'first do no harm' with 'nothing ventured, nothing gained'.

There is a sentence from a previous review on the back of this that suggests that if you buy one book in medical school you should buy this one. For the medical specialties this is probably still pertinent and I think it is a worthwhile addition to the personal library. I would not have the temerity to suggest that it covers the surgical specialties in adequate depth. You might be advised to get books for areas such as obstetrics and paediatrics in addition.

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