

Clinical Risk Management (3rd edn)

Edited by C Vincent
BMJ Publishing Group 2001
Price £47.50. Pp 573
ISBN 0 7279 1392 1

The health professions are now in the busiest times in the history of UK health-care delivery. For two decades continuous structural and financial changes have focused on bringing accountability for decisions on care as close as possible to those responsible for its delivery. Recent years have seen clinical governance move centre-stage as an accounting responsibility in the NHS. At the same time, we have seen the most fundamental reform of our civil justice system for several centuries, and a seemingly unstoppable increase in the costs of clinical negligence litigation.

So it is not surprising that NHS organizations have recognized the importance of clinical risk reduction, regardless of their motivation.

This is the third edition of a comprehensive review of the field, and if the first was not a standard text, this certainly deserves to be. Charles Vincent has established a near unassailable position as one of the most respected researchers and teachers in this field, further enhanced by this book.

The book has a simple structure, starting by setting out the basics of risk management from first principles, then moving through risk reduction in clinical practice, the conditions needed for safe practice, and finally implementing risk management strategies — from prevention to handling disputes. The simplicity is underpinned by clear, accessible writing, and a well-structured guide to the whole book from the editor.

My one criticism is that the chapters dealing with different clinical specialties focus almost entirely on medical practice. This contrasts with the rest of the book, which gives a proper emphasis to multiprofessional team working: it would have been helpful to have reflected this throughout the book.

This book should find a home on the shelf of everyone working in health care who has an interest in risk reduction, beginners and experts alike. Its use will pay huge dividends.

Alastair Scotland, Chelsea and Westminster Healthcare NHS Trust

Clinical Knowledge and Practice in the Information Age

Jeremy Wyatt
RSM Press 2001
Price £12.95. Pp 93
ISBN 1 85315 483 0

This is a slim paperback based on a series of ten articles which first appeared in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*. It attempts to help clinicians understand how to get the best out of advances in modern communications, improving their clinical knowledge and that of others, and to participate in health service innovation.

This is a timely publication, bearing in mind the likely introduction of revalidation, that there are some 400 000 new articles added to Medline each year, and the ever higher public expectations demanded of the medical profession. The danger of information overload and the speed and power of communications make it clear that information technology (IT) needs to be properly harnessed, although I suspect very few of us are actually taught to use IT effectively.

This book neatly condenses the what, why and how of getting you and your organization better organized through IT. It is filled with references, case studies of what works (and, importantly, what doesn't) and offers helpful suggestions and frameworks for what are currently achievable to make IT a powerful tool in clinical medicine and not a hindrance. This book is a worthy and much-needed guide to IT and its application to contemporary medicine. What it doesn't offer is the investment in time and resources to make it all work properly.
Richard Lau, St George's Hospital, London

Psychotropic Drug Directory 2000

Stephen Bazire
Quay Books 2000
Price £19.99. Pp 324
ISBN 1 85642 180 5

Evidence-based practice involves the judicious and explicit use of current procedures involving decisions about patient care. Information from randomized controlled trials and evaluation by meta-analysis enables clinicians to prescribe medications, based more on scientific evidence. In this respect this book is a useful companion to the British National Formulary and MIMS in that it provides extensive information on many aspects of drug prescribing in psychiatry. Some important issues not often discussed in textbooks, such as prescribing in pregnancy, and troublesome side-effects of psychotropic drugs, e.g. weight gain, are included.

The book attempts to encourage the most effective methods of drug treatment to improve the quality of life of psychiatric patients. For the treatment of bipolar mood disorder, combination therapies (with references) are discussed in addition to standard treatments with lithium or carbamazepine or sodium valproate. New sections on drug-induced psychiatric disorders have been included and topics are arranged in a problem-orientated manner. Although monoamine oxidase inhibitors are not as widely prescribed as in the past the book contains an interesting summary of food interactions, which readers will find interesting.

There is a drawback to the book in that it presents with a bewildering array of data with many overlapping aspects of drug use, particularly the antidepressants, being repeated. There is no doubt that the book would appeal to pharmacists, although whether or not undergraduates or postgraduates in psychiatry will find the book useful is debatable as it is rather cumbersome to read and digest.

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