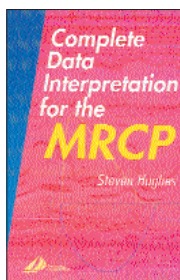


Complete Data Interpretation for the MRCP

Steven Hughes
Churchill Livingstone 2001
Price £16.95. Pp 285
ISBN 0 443 06446 6

The central idea of this preparatory text is the clustering of sequential questions around the same investigation. In this way, Steven Hughes attempts to emphasize different interpretations of each test's results and their discriminatory potential. Each group of questions is supported by extensive, didactic and annotated explanations which extend beyond the material covered by the questions alone, such that almost two thirds of the book consists of answers and concise textbook-style description.

The breadth of the book's content is ambitious for a single author, and inevitably some nuances of interpretation, e.g. debated and variable numerical thresholds for dynamic endocrine tests, cannot be



acknowledged, but these are not likely to be important for the MRCP exam. The organization of questions around specific tests works well, and encourages an even-handed approach to data handling, while the explanatory sections strike an excellent balance between comprehensive coverage of relevant material and an easily accessible, dynamic format suitable for quick reference (a good example of this is the explanation of M mode echocardiography). The book is not a facsimile of the MRCP in terms of question style and mixture, and does not seek to be one: it should be regarded rather as a concise textbook of clinical data handling, with preceding questions to give the text focus.

The market for preparatory texts for the MRCP part 2 exam is a crowded one, but this new contribution deserves serious consideration for use either on its own or as a more focused adjunct to exam-style questions.

Robert Semple, Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge

Yearbook of Obstetrics and Gynaecology Volume 9

Edited by David Sturdee, Karl Oláh,
Declan Keane
RCOG Press 2001
Price £47.50. Pp 372
ISBN 1900364484

This volume provides 32 chapters of varied, modern and insightful information ranging from the historical (floodings of pregnancy, circa 1775) to the present (teenage pregnancy).

The editors have carefully selected each subject and author. The text conveys the clear interest and enthusiasm that many, if not all, authors have for their speciality area. The array of subject matter involves a multidisciplinary approach and testifies to the wide concern and problems that arise in obstetrics and gynaecology. Suitably informed and explained the clinician is better prepared after reading the yearbook.

As the editor points out, many of the chapters are derived from Royal College lectures that were sparsely attended. It therefore makes amends to be able to capture these gems of information, which might otherwise be lost. An appropriate title is needed for this annual and important text as it provides clear evidence of modern thinking in the practise of obstetrics and gynaecol-

ogy. The editor offers a prize for an improved title, which is needed for such a distinguished collection of essays.

*Roy G Farquharson, Liverpool
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International Handbook of Alcohol Dependence and Problems

Edited by Nick Heather, Timothy Peters, Tim Stockwell
John Wiley & Son Ltd 2001
Price £95.00. Pp 892
ISBN 0 471 98375 6

As far as I am aware, this book is the most comprehensive UK textbook on man's relationship with alcohol. Chapters are contributed by many of the giants from research and treatment.

The book is prone to the same difficulties that face every multi-author text: repetition of information and consistency of perspective. Some skilful editorship has largely solved the former, but the second problem appears harder to crack – the unwieldy title itself suggests conflicting conceptualizations of drinking problems. And chapter 31, for instance (written by one of the three editors, Nick Heather), is at some variance with the 'traditional' feel of the book. This is no bad thing; Heather is a premier league academic, and his views

on brief interventions illustrate that the world of alcohol studies is at a crucial point in its development.

Elsewhere, Robin Room expresses the worry that his social constructivist approach will soon be consigned to intellectual history. The offering from the cognitive-behavioural elite of Parks et al reads as a little out-moded. Meanwhile, Timothy Peters (a biochemist) asserts that, 'Undoubtedly, molecular sociology will...dominate the next two or three decades'. I'm not so sure – I don't even know what molecular sociology is.

Little of this (particularly my ignorance) is a flaw in this book – new hypotheses should compete with revisited older notions. What matters is the rigour of academic enquiry and depth of understanding with which these concepts are explored. These vary from the adequate (Janice Brown's analysis of treatment effectiveness) through the innovative and informative (McIlwain and Carvolth's work on creation of safer drinking environments) to the out-and-out masterly (Chad Emrick's analysis of Alcoholic's Anonymous). All things considered, the breadth and depth of this book make it a mandatory purchase for anyone looking to commission or manage an alcohol service in this country.

Dave Marteau, Prison Service, London