

Books

New Drugs

Ed. by John Feely. 3rd ed. Pp. 448. £20.00. London: BMJ. 1994. ISBN 0-7279-0821-9.

New drugs are regularly introduced onto the international and South African pharmaceutical markets, although not all of these are remarkably different from previous agents in their class. The rapidly growing range of products can be overwhelming and confusing to the prescriber. *New Drugs*, edited by John Feely, places the newer agents into perspective, supplying the reader with an idea of where they fit into the pharmacological classification.

The advances in drug therapy and the current thinking in pharmacological treatments are discussed in chapters divided either into disease states or drug classes. The chapters are written by various authors, many of whom are experts in their topic fields. The drug monographs include pharmacokinetics and compare the newer agents with established drugs. However, some monographs (e.g. the selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitors) are very brief. The overview is not extensive or comprehensive, but provides understanding of the mechanisms of action and the newer agents' place in therapy. As an example, the chapter on antibiotics provides a brief overview of the latest developments in cephalosporins, macrolides and fluoroquinolones and provides user-friendly comparative tables. The chapters on drug interactions and adverse events explain the mechanism of adverse drug effects and assist the reader in assessing the probability of an adverse event being drug-induced. A useful chapter on poisoning/overdose and its management is included.

The contents tend to refer to statistics, drug registrations and therapeutic policies relevant in the United Kingdom and South African readers may find it limiting. The pharmacological agents discussed in the book are not all registered in South Africa yet, although some have been registered recently. Overall, the content is current and topical and of particular interest are the future developments discussed in individual chapters.

The book will prove useful to student and practitioners requiring an easy-to-understand handbook and wanting to update their knowledge on the newer pharmacological agents. It is, however, not a quick-reference for busy practitioners/prescribers, but provides basic background into the pharmacology of these agents.

Elske Smith
Vanessa Harris

Capnography — Principles and Practice Series

By David O'Flaherty. Series editors C. E. W. Hahn and A. P. Adams. Pp. vii + 108. Illustrated. London: BMJ. 1994. ISBN 0-7279-0796-4.

Over the past decade there has been a dramatic improvement in the standards of intraoperative monitoring. In South Africa this improvement has largely been driven by the *Guidelines For Practice* produced by the South African Society of Anaesthesiologists and we have recently seen the widespread introduction of the use of pulse oximetry. Many anaesthesiologists will, however, be aware that the measurement of expired carbon dioxide is an even more valuable monitor than oximetry. It can therefore be expected that within the next five years we will, and should, see much wider use of capnography. This book by O'Flaherty as part of the BMJ Principles and Practice Series is therefore a timely publication.

The first two sections cover basic concepts and include a useful section on the alveolar — end tidal CO₂ tension difference. I found the next section on measuring carbon dioxide to be a little too long and felt it unlikely to be of great use to the practising anaesthesiologist, who really

wants to know how to use the capnograph. This aspect is covered in the sections on normal and abnormal waveforms which are liberally supplied with schematic waveforms and tables of causes of abnormal patterns. Of particular interest was the section on capnography in intensive care. Lastly the book is rounded off with a section on capnography in paediatric anaesthesia.

Overall the book is well written and easy to read. It will be a valuable source of information for the teacher and for those who will have to motivate for equipment purchase in the next few years. Those in a position to do so are urged to obtain a copy.

D. A. Rocke

The Hand Book — A practical approach to common hand problems

Ed. by Ulrich Mennen. 2nd ed. Pp. 248. Illustrated. Pretoria: J.L. van Schaik Publishers. 1994. ISBN 0-627-02009-7.

The second edition is an updated version of *The Hand Book* written by South African hand surgeons and an occupational therapist for registrars and medical students. It concisely describes common hand problems, with a superb discussion of wrist problems and congenital deformities covering what a registrar should know. Unfortunately it lacks the full routine examination of the hand and wrist, although neurovascular examination is described. The chapter on the shoulder, and perhaps the elbow, is superfluous. The contributors names are not attached to their chapters, as in the first edition.

A chapter on management of the injured hand has been added since the first edition in 1988.

The descriptions of anatomy, pathogenesis and pathology are accurate and short enough for registrars to absorb rapidly. The treatment reflects the approach of the contributors and includes useful tips. Unfortunately personal preference is not always indicated when a choice of procedures or controversy regarding indications exist, so that the inexperienced registrar or student is not made aware of the controversy. Examples are in Swanneck or Boutonniere deformities, internal neurolysis in carpal tunnel syndrome, excising a diamond of skin in hand infections, not mentioning arthrodesis in proximal interphalangeal joint crush fractures and the indications and motor choice in tendon transfers for radial nerve palsy. The recommendation to do a tendon transfer for radial nerve neuropraxia is wrong, because full recovery will occur usually by 3 to 4 months. The transfer will not improve the final result, but will permanently limit wrist flexion.

The Hand Book should be read by every registrar early in their hand surgery training. At R89,50 every registrar can afford to add one to their library. There are useful blank pages at the end of each chapter to add notes. It is not meant to be a reference book and is probably too extensive for medical students.

Wikus de Jager

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1. Oswald I. Data on file, Roussel 2. Gringas M et al. J of Int Med Res 1984; 12:10

Safety and Nutritional Adequacy of Irradiated Food

WHO. Pp. 155. Geneva: WHO. 1994. ISBN 92-4-156262-9.

Ideally, food should be consumed when it is as fresh as possible, but such is the nature of modern food production and distribution that some form of preservation is usually needed to prevent it deteriorating between the point of production and that of consumption. There are many different ways of doing this, such as drying, salting, heat-treating, pickling and preserving, freezing and, more recently, irradiation or as it is sometimes called, radurisation. This technique has, predictably, led to considerable resistance from some consumer groups, which look upon the whole technique with considerable suspicion. This booklet, which has originated from the WHO's Expert Committee on the Wholesomeness of Irradiated Food, attempts to meet these objections, and concludes, equally predictably, that there are no untoward risks to health from irradiated food and that 'countries should apply food irradiation for the full benefit of their people, regardless of the stage of development reached'.

There are, however, two issues which, to my mind, are not adequately addressed. First is the issue of labelling. The booklet states 'it is likely that labels declaring that food has been irradiated would be required by law, and there is no reason to suppose that such labelling requirements would be ignored by government authorities'. Such a statement is almost unbelievably naive. It would clearly be in the interests

of those carrying out irradiation of food to conceal that fact from consumers because of prejudice against the technique, and if my information is correct, in South Africa, labelling to indicate that food has been irradiated is only required on bulk stocks, and not on packaging intended for retail distribution. Consumers must surely be given this information in order that they may make a free choice as to whether to purchase such food or not, and such a requirement should be legally enforced.

The other issue concerns the whole question of the safe disposal of nuclear waste which has not yet been settled (apart from using the technological equivalent of sweeping household dust under the carpet). Should we therefore be encouraging the spread of techniques involving the use of radioactive material when other, ecologically safe and well-tried methods for preserving food are already widely available? Again, the recommendation that irradiation of food should be adopted by countries 'regardless of the stage of development reached' smacks of the remoteness of experts from the realities of everyday life at grass roots level. There have already been some tragic accidents where radioactive material has been inadvertently let loose into the community, and introducing such material into third world communities which lack the sophistication to deal with it is asking for trouble.

This is an interesting book to read, but in my opinion leans too much towards bland reassurance rather than realistic assessment.

N. C. Lee