



PHYSICAL SIGNS OF CHILD ABUSE: A COLOUR ATLAS

Christopher J Hobbs and Jane M Wynne-Saunders
Harcourt Brace, Sidcup, Kent (1995)
 245 Pages. Price £60.00 (hbk)
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This book focuses on the visible clinical findings of abuse, and unlike other publications, covers all the major forms of abuse and neglect in a single volume. It is an atlas and responds to the idea that one photograph says as much as a thousand words. This book is not one for bedtime reading as the photographs have an intensely emotional impact and are of an extremely distressing nature. I was taken back to stage 1 of Kempes stages of progress in recognizing abuse as it is so hard to accept the extreme damage that people do to even very young babies. The quality of the photographs is superb, which allows the full impact of the savagery of the pictures to imprint themselves on the reader. The authors are very ambitious in that they have aimed the book at all agencies involved with the care of children, including health, social work, legal and educational agencies.

There is a very important truth in the statement that a child thought to have been abused should be examined because there is a need to: (1) detect any traumatic or infective disorders which need treatment; (2) evaluate the nature of any abuse; (3) provide forensic evidence which may be helpful to the future protection of children; (4) reassure the child; and (5) begin the process of recovery.

The layout of the book is excellent with colour coding to facilitate the reader's journey through the text. The photographs are arranged in a logical way with captions clearly relating to each picture. There is a section relating to each aspect of child abuse and each section is divided into chapters.

The section on 'Physical abuse' reminded me to look carefully at any history relating to trauma involving a child and indeed any elderly person as well. In the chapter on burns, the legend at one photograph read, 'The child was seen to be scalded by the health visitor on a routine visit' — a mistake in syntax that will not be appreciated by the Health Visitor Association!

The chapter entitled 'Fatal injuries' was quite devastating with the eyes of these dead children looking out in their pain at the reader — a new interpretation of frozen watchfulness. I wonder if this chapter could have been deleted as it really is overwhelming and the quality of information gleaned from the rest of the book makes me doubt whether there is anything gained by retaining it. This is especially so as the intended readership for the book includes all agencies caring for children.

The section on the 'Failure to thrive' was most helpful, and should be required reading for judges and sheriffs with the splendid growth curves underlining failure to thrive as a form of abuse. They should help understanding of the implications of

these measurements in demonstrating that such abuse has occurred.

The section on 'Sexual abuse' had much useful information. I was left in no doubt as to the difficulty for professionals not regularly assessing genitalia in knowing what is abuse. The quality of the photographs remained excellent. I was pleased to find a picture showing perineal streptococcal infection. This is not an uncommon infection of vulva and anus, and a good reason for sending off swabs from either area. In all sections, potential pitfalls of diagnosis relating to normal explanations or other disease entities as explanations for appearances that might be abuse.

Having read the book, I was put in mind of Genesis III, Verse 5: 'For God knows that when you eat of the fruit of the tree of life your eyes will be opened and you will be like God knowing good and evil.' In recent years, child abuse has become increasingly recognized as a major source of morbidity and mortality for children in countries of both the developed and developing world. It is a sad fact that everybody involved with children has to open their eyes and recognize this evil. This book helps that awareness in a unique way. This is a book that would be a worthwhile addition to any practice library, although I would tend to recommend that, if there was a limitation of funding, the *ABC of Child Abuse* would be the first book to go for, because this excellent volume is expensive.

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TELEMATICS IN PRIMARY CARE IN EUROPE

J De Maeseneer and L Boelchi (eds)
University Gent, Gent (1995)
 181 pages

This book is concerned with the work of a concerted action organized as one of the AIM projects in the European Union.

As I read the book, I felt the need for telematics (provision of information through telecommunication) was illustrated in a peculiarly ironic way. There are several forays in this area throughout Europe, some of which are summarized in the book, but the situation is changing so rapidly that the situation on the ground has changed, by the time this book was published.

The first chapter presents an overview of primary care in Europe. A variety of data are presented, but we have little information about the sources, the size of samples or the validity of the data. It includes a section on the use of computerized medical records but it does not address the issues that really