



CONTROVERSIES IN THERAPEUTICS

Peter Rubin (ed)

British Medical Journal, London (1991)

67 pages. Price £9.95

Doctors love marginal decisions, and any who have thrown away their back issues of the *British Medical Journal* will enjoy *Controversies in therapeutics* which consists of reprints of a recent series of 17 articles. Each article contains two essays offering contrasting approaches to a controversial topic, with a short comment from Peter Rubin who casts his editor's vote for the doctor who wants to find out what to do. The most interesting pieces are on: iron in pregnancy; long term H₂ antagonists; generic prescribing; otitis media; benzodiazepine dependence; and urinary infections in children. These contain useful material for anyone working on a practice formulary.

Although this is a book aimed at general practitioners only one of the 37 authors is a general practitioner, and it shows. The article entitled 'Thrombolysis and the general practitioner' was written by two consultant cardiologists when the Royal College of General Practitioners has embarked on what appears to be the definitive trial on the subject, 'childhood otalgia' is used in place of earache and the article on the management of constipation was written by a professor of medicine and a gastroenterologist.

However, I learned from this book how important it is to determine what is and what is not controversial. The temptation to spend too long reflecting over marginal decisions must be resisted. Controversy carries the risk that we will ignore, as boring, the undisputed, effective elements central to our work.

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THE ART OF GENERAL PRACTICE (4th edition)

David Morrell

Oxford University Press (1991)

157 pages. Price £8.95 (p/b), £20.00 (h/b)

Professor Morrell is the doyen of academic general practice, and earlier editions of his book have been widely accepted as thorough and valuable aids to anyone needing an introduction to the discipline. This latest edition, to which the original title has been restored, sets out to bring the work up to date.

It has chapters on the characteristics of general practice, problem solving, history taking, physical examination, prognosis and treatment, and a section on prevention, health education and the primary care team. All offer views balanced to suit the needs of the undergraduates at whom the book is aimed; I would also be happy if they were read by doctors from other disciplines,

politicians and the managers of regional health authorities and family health services authorities.

The strength of the work, however, lies in what it carries over from the earlier editions: the updating is thin. Since the fundamental problems and common situations of medicine in general practice have not changed greatly in the last decade this may not matter greatly to a new reader, but I was disappointed. There is scarcely a reference later than 1980; and some statements are misleadingly out of date, for example, that appointment systems have become popular in the last 10 years. There is nothing about either computers or audit, yet both are subjects that students trying to understand the ways in which doctors in primary care are defining their problems need guidance on.

No review is complete without a few niggles. I was irritated by the apparent equation of tonsillitis and pharyngitis, and the perennial issue of the use of antibiotics in upper respiratory infections is dealt with inadequately. I was not happy with the title either: the book is about the craft, not the art, of general practice, and quite rightly so. The creative aspects of general practice would demand a very different format and could not mean much to anyone who had not mastered the craft.

Medical students are not renowned for an interest in books about general practice, but those who do read this one will not be shortchanged. For the next edition though there must be a more thorough revision.

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ABC OF MAJOR TRAUMA

D Skinner, P Driscoll and R Easlam (eds)

British Medical Journal, London (1991)

117 pages. Price £12.95

This book lives up to the standards of other publications in the ABC series. It is liberally illustrated with high quality photographs and illustrations. The layout of the pages makes for easy reading with well positioned summary notes.

The book deals with the management of serious and life-threatening injuries that require prompt treatment. The majority of the contents are related to the management of trauma within the controlled environment of an accident and emergency department. The treatments described pre-suppose the presence of fully trained medical and nursing staff and sophisticated resuscitation equipment.

General practitioners may form an integral part of such a team, especially in more rural areas, and the contents of this book will have particular relevance to them. In urban areas, where major trauma services are provided by a combination of hospital accident unit and ambulances staffed with paramedics, general practitioners may still have a role. This role will be