



CLINICAL EXAMINATION

O Epstein, G D Perkin, D P de Bono and J Cookson
Mosby, London (1993)
432 pages. Price £19.95

This is a superbly illustrated and concise textbook of examination, a book that I wish had been available in my student days. The style is approachable and sensible with the sort of flow and clarity that enables the reader to follow the text without having to review difficult sections. This is a modern text in all senses; the examination method is supported by reference to up to date investigations such as echocardiography and computerized tomography scans. The text is liberally illustrated with clear drawings, revision boxes and high quality photographs. The pictures of chest x-rays and skin diseases are particularly clear.

The introductory sections on the clinical record and history taking are well written with the newly arrived clinical student in mind. There is advice as to how to put patients at ease; open style questions frame the approach. The book is not designed to be carried in one's pocket but the illustrations more than make up for this; older 'standard' texts seem dowdy and stuffy in comparison.

The neurology section is particularly helpful with a number of photographic sequences demonstrating for example, cranial nerve palsies. All the illustrations are available as a separate slide atlas which should prove invaluable to clinical teachers. I would recommend the book to all general practitioners who teach medical students; it will serve as a useful guide to the best technique to teach in examination and as a reference for rarer signs. The book will be particularly useful to MRCP candidates as well as medical students and those wishing to check their own method.

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A refreshing response to the difficult questions surrounding rationing is the realization of the need to involve different members of the population in the debate. Even if health professionals have been implicitly rationing health resources, the ability to ration explicitly can only be done with the support of the nation as a whole. The book describes how different countries have tackled this problem, starting with a description of the Oregon experiment in the United States of America where a list of priorities was identified using a health services commission comprising medical personnel, nurses, social workers and consumers. The Dutch government's attempt to transform health care in the Netherlands is discussed, with the emphasis being on 'necessary care', in order to provide a basic package of service for all.

Later sections of *Rationing in action* deal with the economic theory of priority setting by various experts in the field. The viewpoint of the general practitioner is described in the context of being an advocate for the individual patient rather than as an explicit rationer on behalf of the government.

I found this book rather difficult to read, perhaps because of the repetitive nature of the thought processes expounded by the different authors. There is no doubt that any answer requires a multifactorial input but I was not surprised at the general consensus of opinion and could perhaps have prophesied how the individuals' lack of knowledge of a particular area could have influenced their differing perspectives.

In summary, I would agree with Richard Smith, editor of the *British Medical Journal*, that the book is a useful contribution to the debate on rationing but it needs to be taken in sections for ease of assimilation. The concept of a transfer of resources to health care in its widest sense must surely be a priority and if this book helps us to reach that goal then it must reach a wide audience.

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RATIONING IN ACTION

British Medical Journal, London (1993)
207 pages. Price £10.95

This book is a compilation of the concepts of 'priority setting' by a number of different experts.

The first contributors ask whether rationing is inevitable and, at a time of increasing demands on the public purse, what is the most effective, cost efficient way of providing health care for all. The government perspective is set out by the secretary of state for health who, interestingly, acknowledges the importance of the patient's view, while the consumer responds in later chapters of the book.

ABC OF SLEEP DISORDERS

Colin M Shapiro (ed)
British Medical Journal, London (1993)
90 pages. Price £12.95

We spend around a third of our lives asleep, and disturbances of sleep are common presenting complaints to general practitioners. These facts alone should be sufficient to arouse interest in this book which is based on a series of articles, most of which have appeared in the *British Medical Journal* in 1992-93. It introduces the reader to new ideas and concepts about sleep, some of which I found refreshingly new and pleasantly presented. I had not realized how much new research has taken place in this area over