



CARDIOLOGICAL DILEMMAS

Roger Blackwood and Bev Daily
Beaconsfield Publishers, Beaconsfield (1995)
 88 pages. Price £10.95

Roger Blackwood and Bev Daily have set out to write an easily accessible little book in a question and answer format for general practitioners. Bev Daily puts the questions about the management of cardiological problems and Roger Blackwood provides the answers. Some of these 100 questions can seem contrived and some are there for padding but I found myself enjoying the chatty and opinionated responses by the consultant. Squash players are 'barmy' and overweight patients are told to '...eat less bread'. It is reminiscent of the pithy sort of teaching from ward rounds when an amiable consultant would chat over coffee and biscuits.

The book is at its best when discussing the changes in cardiology over the last 10 years or so, and what the general practitioner and the patient can now reasonably expect from hospitals. It presents this with brevity and utmost clarity. Updates are included on hypertension and hormone replacement therapy, anticoagulants in atrial fibrillation, the use of echocardiography in the investigation of heart failure and the aggressive use of coronary angiography in coronary heart disease.

This is not a book for reading at one sitting but more for dipping into from time to time. In such a slim book there is no room for discussion in depth of the important issues raised nor unfortunately for a bibliography.

If you like answers in black and white, and opinion rather than detailed research findings, then this little book may be for you.

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CUTANEOUS CRYOSURGERY: PRINCIPLES AND CLINICAL PRACTICE

R Dawber, G Colver and A Jackson
Martin Dunitz, London (1992)
 176 pages. Price £39.95

Although cryosurgery (the destruction of tissue by means of freezing) is a widely accepted method of treatment of superficial lesions, it is probably underused in primary care. The reasons for this are twofold. First, formal training in the technique is rarely included in the medical curriculum although some practitioners gain experience when they hold a postregistration appointment in a dermatology department and, secondly, there are often considerable logistic problems concerned with supply and

storage of freezing substances. The result is that cryosurgery is used somewhat empirically by general practitioners and results are not as satisfactory as might be expected.

Cutaneous cryosurgery: principles and clinical practice is an excellent foundation for both training and practice. It starts with a brief history of the subject and considers the scientific basis. Equipment and techniques are then comprehensively described. Liquid nitrogen is clearly the cryogen of choice since the boiling point is sufficiently low to ensure reliable tissue destruction in a wide range of circumstances, and other forms of refrigeration, although listed, are not considered in great detail. Lesions amenable to cryosurgery are then grouped into those that are benign, pre-malignant and, after discussion of patient selection, method of application and prognosis, each chapter is profusely illustrated with an 'atlas of clinical practice' containing numerous excellent colour photographs. There follows a discussion of side effects, complications and contraindications and the final chapter gives advice on the setting up of a cryosurgery clinic in a practice. For general practitioners who may have taken a somewhat tentative approach to cryosurgery in the past, this book is essential reading.

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DRUG EDUCATION IN GENERAL PRACTICE

Occasional paper 69

M M Kochen (ed)
Royal College of General Practitioners, London (1995)
 46 pages. Price £13.20 (RCGP members £12.00)

The challenge of educating doctors to prescribe cost effectively and rationally is tackled by this occasional paper. Administrators are usually looking for cost savings above quality as a priority. Good prescribing, as Michael Boland says, depends on doctors applying their knowledge compassionately and skilfully. He also asserts (and I agree) that specialists need to have had generalist experience in the community.

Analysis of prescribing via prescribing analyses and cost (PACT) data (or its equivalent) provides data but not interpretation and, as Colin Bradley points out, many of the dilemmas of prescribing are psychological and stressful. Flora Haaijer-Ruskamp and Petra Denig, together with Margaret Maxwell and John Howie, explore the effect of feedback on general practitioners' prescribing. Hugh McGavock's highly practical 'compass' report for any practice asking for advice on prescribing, together with his jigsaw of interacting factors, illuminate the benefits of feedback.