The Osler Medical Handbook, 2nd Edition
Piccini JP and Nilsson KR
Elsevier, Saunders, 2006
ISBN: 0323037488; $49.95

When I was first presented with the task of reviewing this book, I thought that a book with Sir William Osler’s name on the cover would have to live up to high standards to be worthy of the use of his name. Certainly there are challenges to producing a comprehensive handbook which can easily slide into the pockets of a lab coat, especially since the role of electronic textbooks continues to increase. I also wondered what another book may add to an area that was already well covered by others; as this book is competing against similar products, The Washington Manual of Therapeutics and Pocket Medicine, which have already established a reputation in this genre. All three of these handbooks are multi-authored collections that summarize commonly encountered areas of clinic medicine, with an emphasis upon inpatient medicine. Each is a collaboration of internal medicine residents and their respective faculty of a prestigious teaching hospital. The typical audience for this type of book includes medical students, residents, and even practicing clinicians. The Osler Medical Handbook has some features that serve to distinguish it from the others that I will detail in this review.

The book is divided into 4 parts: Part I: Acute Management of the Adult Patient, Part II: Diagnostic and Therapeutic Information, Part III: Comparative Pharmacology and Dosing Tables, and Part IV: Rapid References. The bulk of the book is contained within the 87 chapters comprising Part II focusing on common conditions and problems. Each chapter is organized with a common design format that begins with a section entitled “Fast Facts” composed of key points to remember as you start your journey through the text. When such a format is appropriate, to the subject matter, the chapters cover: epidemiology, clinical presentation, diagnosis, and management. The chapter text concludes with a section called “Pearls and Pitfalls” that many times offers evidenced based clinical pearls. Unique to this handbook, in contrast with others, is that accompanying the references at the end of each chapter is an evidence grade ranging from A to D. Not only is the reader provided with the list of references, as the other books do, but we are also given the relative strength of the evidence to support their viewpoint.

In this era of medical practice the adjunctive role of the personal digital assistant (PDA) seems to continue to be identified and expand. For some, the digital book has supplanted the place of the pocket handbook. With a price of $49.95, in comparison with The Washington Manual and Pocket Medicine which sell for $44.95 it would seem like the printed version book will cost you more. A unique feature of this second edition of The Osler Medical Handbook is that its PDA software, which includes 13 supplemental chapters not included in the book, is included in the initial purchase price therefore the user will receive the equivalent of what those other two books are selling separately at half of the expense.

The Osler Medical Housestaff, together with their faculty, at Johns Hopkins University has produced a handbook worthy of comparison with its peers. The editors of this latest edition close their preface by writing “It is our hope that it enhances your clinical practice and fosters bedside patient care, as advocated by Sir William Osler, so many years ago.” Based upon my review, I think it fair to say that have achieved that goal and honor the legacy of the man whose name adorns this book.

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Sleisenger and Fordtran’s Gastrointestinal and Liver Disease, 8th Edition
Feldman M, Friedman LS and Brandt LJ (Editors)
Saunders Elsevier, 2006 (3112 pages 1074 illustrations)

The 8th edition of this classic text is the first for which neither Drs. Fordtran nor Sleisenger had a first hand role in editing. This edition added Dr. Lawrence Brandt to its editors thus probably eliminating one competing textbook (Brandt’s Clinical Practice of Gastroenterology). The font seems to be a little larger than the 7th edition. Many new authors have been added and there are some new chapters to the book. The sections have been color coded, a nice addition. The most recent references are from 2004 with an occasional one from 2005.
Most graphs and illustrations are in color. With a few exceptions (e.g., Chapter 67, Endoscopic and Radiologic Treatment of Biliary Disease) the illustrations could use more arrows and explanations of the points being depicted by the printed X-ray or endoscopic photographs. The purpose of this text is to be a reference for all levels—the early learner needs all the arrows s/he can get.

I was disappointed that I could not find any significant text on abdominal wall pain and its treatment although there was one reference to Carnett’s sign (present when the abdominal wall is tensed when the pain is induced within the abdominal wall). A short treatment of the physiology (A-delta nociceptor vs C-nociceptor) and suggested therapy would be important in this very common finding. I tried to find recommendations for endocarditis prophylaxis for gastrointestinal procedures but could not find a reference to it in the index. While I realize this text is not primarily endoscopically focused shouldn’t there be some mention of some of the issues with endoscopy including cleaning?

All in all this is a fine textbook, continuing to lead the way as a standard GI reference but is somewhat handicapped by its inability to keep up with the current literature due to the publication delay. Could this text be published online and updated two or three times a year? Does this text need to do this to compete with other reference materials such as UpToDate?

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DISCLOSURE: I am an author for UpToDate

Clinical Dilemmas in Inflammatory Bowel Disease
Irving P, Rampton D and Shanahan F (Editor)
Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2006
ISBN: 1-4051-3377-5; $59.95

The management of Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) is a challenge for gastroenterologists and requires an approach combining both the science and the art of medicine. Individual patients with unique manifestations need management that is tailored to specific problems, is evidence-based, and practical. The management of many extraintestinal manifestations often fall into the hands of the gastroenterologist.

This book contains a collection of short articles, each of which is focused on a particular problem encountered in the management of IBD. It is simple to read and reflects the collective clinical experience and knowledge of 100 authors from Europe and Canada on 60 different problems related to IBD. Most contain areas of controversy. It contains not only a summary of the evidence to support various therapies but valuable clinical pearls from the authors’ years of experience. The chapters are concise and relevant. Each has a summary of key “learning points” at the beginning and a list of references for more detailed reading at the end. The chapters are well organized, provocative, and practical. Many reinforced my clinical approach and some forced me to reconsider some areas of my practice. The chapters on perianal disease had some excellent photos of fistula detected with MRI. The chapters on indeterminate colitis, the effect of stress, and the coexistence of IBS were very practical. The chapter on the use of heparin was excellent and summarized relevant studies from the past literature.

Each chapter was written by different authors and, although most were excellent, some reviews were cursory. The review of viral hepatitis in patients with IBD did not reflect my clinical practice and may need to be revisited. The section on the use of infliximab in pregnancy detailed all the evidence pointing to its safety but if one only read the “learning points” one would “avoid use in pregnancy.” Some challenging topics were omitted such as the management of refractory pouchitis. Since each chapter was complete in itself, I was able to read it, as the authors suggested, in between cases and commuting on the train.

In general it was very good, readable, enjoyable and helpful and I would recommend it for all physicians and nurse practitioners who manage patients with inflammatory bowel disease. It is especially recommended for gastroenterology fellows, as the authors clarified, without confusing, complex topics. It combined the science and art of medicine as it applies to the challenges we face in managing Inflammatory Bowel Disease. It is for these reasons that this book is a very valuable resource and I would recommend it to my colleagues.

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