

## The Anesthesiologist's Bookshelf

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### THE TEXTBOOKS OF ANESTHESIOLOGY

At one time or another, every educator has expressed dissatisfaction with the texts available to his students. Almost as frequently, this concern is shared by students, at all stages of learning. In these books they may not find detailed or recent information that they need. There is the danger, especially in the medical sciences, that the student who transmits information from text to teacher with accuracy will be confounded to find that the author and the mentor disagree. To further compound the difficulties, recent years have seen a revolution in medical education regarded by some as mutual ignorance—teachers don't know what to teach and students don't know what they should learn. Discontent persists.

Not to be discouraged, educators continue their efforts. New authors write new texts. Old editions are revised by veterans. Each group of authors claim to pay service to a particularly needy group of students, believing that its approach to medical education is the best and that its peers should follow this pathway. Some take the direct approach of the cookbook, presenting a series of more or less authoritative statements of facts and principles which, it is to be believed, will endure long into the postgraduate years. Others prefer to act in the editorial fashion, collecting the wisdom and opinions of many specialists into, hopefully, a panacea. Still others, with or without editorial assistance and aided by exhaustive bibliographies, offer the student not only authoritative information but diverse views of controversial matters.

Whatever route the authors and editors take, their best efforts are certain to meet with adverse criticism. In reality, this is a very healthy situation.

Let anesthesiologists, both teachers and students at any level of training, become dismayed by the increasing number of publications and feel, as some do, that there are too many books, let them recall the predicament of a generation ago. Anesthesiology was in its infancy. Unlike other medical specialties, it simply had no satisfactory "standard" texts or reference works. In an effort to satisfy their own particular and sometimes peculiar needs, a few enterprising individuals in a few educational institutions began to compile their own notes and "reading lists," giving these to their medical students and residents. From these seeds have come this season's harvest of books on anesthesiology. How they will be used and the enthusiasm of their reception will depend on many factors, the greatest of which is the lack of standardization of teachers and teaching techniques. Nonetheless, let these books be counted as blessings.

*Anaesthetics for Medical Students.* Seventh edition. BY GORDON OSTLERE AND ROGER BRYCE-SMITH. Edinburgh and London, Churchill, Livingstone, and Baltimore, The Williams and Wilkins Company, 1972. Pp. 139. \$3.00.

Except in America, anesthetics are usually administered by physicians. Many are specialists in anesthesiology. Others, in addition to their regular practice, may be called upon to administer anesthetics in unique situations and so find it necessary to develop and maintain an acquaintance with safe and simple techniques. As medical students, these physicians have participated in a certain number of anesthetic procedures, just as American students once learned the rudiments of the practice of obstetrics.

In 1949, Dr. Gordon Ostlere published *Anaesthetics for Medical Students*. This little paperback book, prepared by Dr. Ostlere with the assistance of Dr. Roger Bryce-Smith, is in its seventh edition. This fact must mean that it has served a useful purpose. As explained by the authors, this is a book for medical students who "... are obliged to administer a few anaesthetics, affording them insight into the specialist anaesthetist's problems and—more valuably—experience in the management of unconscious patients. We hope this book will lighten their difficulties in both the operating theatre and the examination room, and equally that it will indicate the safest, if not the ideal, way of going about an unexpected administration in later life."

As its title indicates, this is a primer for medical students who are observing and administering anesthetics as part of their overall medical education. When, later on, they wish to refresh themselves on what they have been taught, a few minutes review will suffice. This is a "cookbook," giving principles and directions in an elementary and most understandable fashion. It is filled with little homilies and anecdotes. Sadly, it lacks illustrations and bibliography. An amazing amount of information has been condensed into this volume, a tribute to the skill of the authors. The British "vocabulary" should not minimize its value to readers of other nations.

It would be easy for many modern educators to dismiss this work as worthless. It is hardly thought-provoking; it skirts many controversial issues; it is lacking in many details; it is not suitable for residency training. But for those who are sympathetic with didactic instruction combined with practical experience; for those who still believe in the straightforward presentation of basic facts to medical students, this inexpensive little book will serve nicely.

It fulfills its declared objective.