HIV in Obstetrics and Gynaecology
J. R. Smith, N. Low-Beer & B. A. Barron

I was looking forward to reviewing this book, as it is the first short textbook I have seen specifically about HIV in obstetrics and gynaecology and, as such, is a welcome step in educating doctors to recognize the wider needs of women living with HIV.

This book is written by two very experienced clinicians involved in HIV management and obstetrics and gynaecology both in the UK and the USA and forms part of a series intended to provide succinct overviews of medical topics. The layout is clear and the text easily readable, with many tables, diagrams and photographs to illustrate and support the text. The chapters are easily identified by colour-coded indexing on the margins and index. It is A5 size, a slim paperback, and would fit most people’s budgets and pockets! There are only 36 key references cited within the appendix, and the references are identified in relation to the book chapters. There are also two recommended internet websites for further information.

The book begins with an overview of HIV virus infection and the management of HIV infection in women. Further chapters cover preconceptual care, antenatal testing, obstetric care, infection control and future trends.

There are many interesting areas of clinical management briefly presented, including an overview of the options available for discordant couples to conceive (e.g. sperm washing). There are sections on areas of debate in obstetrics, e.g. whether elective caesarean section confers any additional benefit in reducing mother-to-child transmission in women receiving highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART). The authors state that ‘women with undetectable viral loads particularly if they are multiparous with good obstetric histories may consider vaginal delivery to be a relatively ‘safe’ option in terms of vertical transmission risk’. However, they do emphasize that HIV-positive women must be given sufficient information to allow them to make an informed decision regarding the mode of delivery.

The contraception section is disappointing, only half a page is given to a topic that should surely warrant more discussion, as most HIV-positive women are sexually active and could be at risk of unplanned pregnancy. There is a brief mention of interactions between antiretroviral medications and hormonal contraception, and no mention of the effects of commonly associated medical treatments and conditions (such as anti-tuberculous drugs and hepatitis C) on contraception choice.

There is little discussion in the book about ethnic and cultural influences that could impact on contraception, reproductive and sexual healthcare choices for many women living with HIV.

There are statements within the text presented as fact without any discussion about the levels of supporting evidence, thus denying an interested reader access to the fuller discussion of areas of debate and the relevant references that support these statements.

The authors should be commended for both their interest and efforts in producing this book. It would be suitable for general practitioners, health advisors and nursing staff working within genito-urinary medicine, midwives and medical students wanting a highly succinct and accessible overview of HIV in obstetrics and gynaecology. It can also be recommended as an introductory text for obstetrics and gynaecology and genito-urinary medicine trainees. I hope that trainees would wish to examine the topic further and beyond the scope of this book; for any practitioners directly involved in the clinical management of HIV-positive women, this book would prove inadequate.

The book does not seem to be directed at HIV-positive women; however, as many of the patient information publications are becoming more clinically orientated, often including evidence-based and research papers, it could also be a useful addition to a HIV clinic patient library.

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