
This book, presented in a new, updated format this year, is targeted at UK-based practitioners, more expressly at trainee anaesthetists as a ‘conceivably comprehensive’ source of clinical information, and at ‘qualified anaesthetists’ as an ‘indispensable aide-memoire’. Its format is modern, utilizing terse language, bullet-pointed presentation of facts and, whenever appropriate, tables. With its ‘problem-orientated approach’ it claims ‘fast access’ to each topic and required information, which ‘facilitates learning’. This demanding set of criteria listed on the coverleaf lends itself to fairly searching criticism.

Accomplishing such stream-lined presentation and pertinence to clinical anaesthetists would render this book a ‘must-have’. The approach, in principle, lends itself also to candidate self-preparation for Royal College examinations. The reviewer therefore tested its remit three ways: would it provide the required outline structure for an FRCA examination lecture on a subject not that familiar to the lecturer; would it be the single book to pack when undertaking a locum post in an unfamiliar hospital; and, would it pass muster in one’s own field of expertise, incorporating all the most important features and salient points in managing those patients?

The book is logically presented in ‘Parts’, 1 to 3. The first part covers ‘Patient Conditions’; the second part ‘Surgical Procedures’; and the third part ‘Anaesthetic Factors’. Each part is subdivided into sections on each organ system (CNS, respiratory, etc.), and each section is divided into chapters. These chapters are in alphabetical order, and cover all common and rare conditions that anaesthetists meet in UK-based practice. The Surgical Procedures are divided into 17 sections, such as Cardiac or Orthopaedics, and each section is divided into chapters. These chapters cover (with rare exceptions) surgical procedures in alphabetical order such as, in the Plastic Surgery section, Burns, then Cosmetic, then Free flap surgery. Finally, comes ‘Anaesthetic Factors’. This covers five large sections on preoperative assessment (12 chapters), Airway (10 chapters), Equipment and monitoring (5), Techniques (8), and Management Problems (29). Again, these chapters are placed in alphabetical order.

This systematic layout meant this reviewer could go directly to the relevant section and chapter, whether stumped by scleroderma, needed orientation on magnetic resonance imaging, or felt apprehensive about APUDomas. The book gave sufficient structure and detail on each topic to begin to prepare methodically a lecture to FRCA candidates. The book certainly refreshed details on conditions met long ago whether in examinations or subspecialty training. Random checking of various references in the chapters found no discrepancies in either the meaning or details referred to in the articles selected by the authors.

Author selection is important in the success or failure of such a book. The sections on Thoracic, Vascular, Neuroanaesthesia and the Airway section are particularly good, appearing authoritatively written from a suitable depth of experience. Crucial to this impression, and a let-down in other chapters, was the currency of reference articles selected. In some chapters they were very old (in one, five of seven predated 1973 and the most recent was 1991). Some looked as if authors had not checked more recent editions—did the Oxford Textbook of Medicine really peak in 1987 with the second edition?

Clearly such a book cannot cover all topics in depth, but some chapters were unnecessarily brief, with considerable blank space left on the page after the chapter’s end. Some inclusions might benefit the book as a whole if added, such as transoesophageal echocardiography, neuromuscular block monitoring, depth of anaesthesia monitoring in more detail, but this reviewer found no major gaps when using the book for a month, which therefore answers the third test—and, yes it would more than suffice as the book for the locum in the unfamiliar hospital.

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Whilst a substantial text on neurointensive care may not initially engage the wider anaesthetic community, the spectrum of neurological pathology and dysfunction is broad and intrudes into many aspects of anaesthetic responsibility. The primary management of these disorders takes place outside of designated units, and is usually delivered by practitioners with limited experience of such tertiary care. Furthermore, within the UK at least, secondary care of most patients with pathology not immediately demanding neurosurgical intervention will continue in generic rather than neurospecific ICUs. The optimal management of these cases, at all stages of the patient pathway, revolves around identifying the need for and expediting specific interventions, and offering key supportive and preventative strategies. This ‘philosophy of care’ demands in turn an understanding by the anaesthetist of certain core principles and the evidence-base behind these.

A textbook of almost 900 pages has the potential to comprehensively address these issues and a range of needs, from the trainee responding to a call from the accident and emergency department to an established consultant on a neuro-ICU reviewing world opinion on a specific aspect of care for teaching, development of protocols, or decision-making. It is unfortunate that despite the predominance of one institution, with 32 chapters and an author base of 70, there is an inevitable fragmentation and somewhat random allocation of chapter content, rather than one coherent theme. This shortcoming in overall achievement is compounded by variability of quality within individual sections, excellent chapters on endovascular aspects, body water/electrolytes and cerebral resuscitation, only marginally compensating for ponderous anatomy text accompanied by images of an inappropriately low standard for this era of publication.

Although each chapter concludes with a cluster of ‘pearls’, these do not always represent a summary position and many chapters failed to achieve closure on key topics or offer practical management advice. Having introduced subject matter such as hypertonic saline, or combination mannitol/loop diuretic therapy in the management of raised ICP, one would expect more definitive advice in a text of this nature than: ‘oftentimes ... several times a day’. In relation to sedative strategies, there is very little discussion on logical progression for resistant patients, ketamine receives more space than propofol, and there is limited debate on the role of clonidine or management of emergence agitation. The
recommendation for midazolam and morphine, avoiding propofol on grounds of expense, is unlikely to strike a chord within UK neuropractise. Other insular aspects include just half a page of reference to the ‘Lund approach’ of ICP rather than CPP (cerebral perfusion pressure)-directed therapy. The chapter on ICP measurement surprisingly omitted interpretation of waveforms, and the section on electrical monitoring failed to explain burst suppression or the principles of the processed EEG, and was accompanied by poor quality graphics. A chapter on spinal issues showed similar poor reproduction of radiological material, and more critically did not propose a consensus position on the use of collars or timing of surgical intervention for the usual fractures.

Although the role of hypothermia is addressed, neuroanaesthetists would be disappointed to find no debate on cerebral protection strategies before the use of temporary vascular clips, or the optimal timing of orthopaedic intervention after brain injury. Intensivists generally would find the recommendation to achieve percutaneous endoscopic jejunostomy feeding within 24 h of injury somewhat strange in the absence of discussion on prokinetic strategies, and one could have expected a respiratory chapter to debate aspiration injury, pneumonia and neurogenic oedema, which are the common problems within a neuro-ICU setting. A chapter on ethical issues is welcome, but there are inconsistencies in defining the status of brain death and it is noteworthy that although there is a section on euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide, there is no discussion on non-heart-beating organ donation, one of the most complex ethical challenges to currently face neurointensivists. Another omission, despite an era of the multidisciplinary team concept, is reference to the integrative role of the physiotherapist from the point of admission onwards, covering aspects such as advanced respiratory management and the early introduction of rehabilitative techniques.

In conclusion, this worthy project offers a US perspective on a broad range of neurosurgical and neurological issues, but is neither comprehensive nor focused on the key components that anaesthetists at different levels of training and in different settings require from a definitive text on this subspecialty. A textbook that offers basic anatomy and physiology should allow any practitioner to follow the patient pathway for any particular pathology, easily identify best practice at any stage, include unequivocal management advice for common problems, and allow access to a balanced debate on unresolved issues. The authors very humbly acknowledge potential shortfalls in an exercise of this magnitude, and constructive criticism may help shape the promised second edition into universally recommended text for individuals and departments both within and outside the neurosciences. Despite the breadth of material and a competitive price, the current format cannot be wholeheartedly endorsed for this purpose, but as an authoritative US text, the book may still find a place within a neuro-ICU as a point of reference.

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Yet another contribution on the topic of paediatric anaesthesia has now been added to the already large body of existing textbooks in anaesthesia. One could have a preconceived idea that an additional such textbook would only represent a tedious repetition of what is already well known to most anaesthetists. However, the editors of the current text have really managed to bring about something that previously has been more or less lacking, i.e. a problem-based volume that has great potential value both for teaching registrars/residents as well as for the more occasional paediatric anaesthetist.

The book comprises 35 chapters/case scenarios written mainly by British-based anaesthetists. Almost all the chapters are relevant to common practice, and include interesting case reports and a thorough discussion of the various relevant aspects of each topic. Each section ends with a list of learning points and the relevant references. The contributions are consistent and the editors have kept repetition of information to a minimum. Apart from the chapters written by the editors themselves, the chapters on herniotomy and the management of chronic knee pain caught this assessor’s specific attention.

So is the book completely without flaws or problems? One issue from an international point of view is, of course, the lack of contribution from continental Europe. This obviously, to some extent, limits the book’s use for the non-British reader, but on the whole the textbook still represents an excellent didactic tool for almost any anaesthetist involved with teaching and education. The inclusion of two chapters devoted to paediatric cardiac anaesthesia does, however, appear to be slightly out of focus with the rest of the text and they could have been omitted. With regards to clinical practice, the recommendation regarding the use of gelatins for volume replacement and 10% glucose solutions as intraoperative maintenance in neonates could be discussed at some length, as could the repeated recommendation of codeine for postoperative analgesia in children.

All in all this textbook is certainly recommended for anyone who is not an expert paediatric anaesthetist, not only to buy but in fact to read from start to finish!

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This substantial volume contains 36 ‘essays’ addressing important ethical issues in human experimentation. The entire series of 15 volumes purports to form an accessible library of basic material likely to elude most scholars. The other ethical dilemmas presented in other volumes include such contemporary areas as The Genome Project and Gene Therapy, edited by Scotland’s inimitable medical ethicist, Sheila McLean; Abortion, edited by Belinda Bennett; and Medicine and Industry, edited by George Tomossy.

This is not an easy read, owing to a combination of varying content style and written style, not to mention the sheer size of the book. Some of the articles appear to have been reproduced entirely from another source and appear in a miniscule font size in columns, whilst others are in a more easily focused-upon size, but a completely different font style. The overall impression is disjointed and unfortunately, rather unprofessional. I suspect the idea was to highlight the ‘essay’ nature of the chapters (i.e. individual opinion and also the historical value in some cases) but I prefer a consistent style that I can read without artificial aids. The style of the actual written content is also variable, with little evidence of editorial input.

Despite my reservations on the presentation of the material in the book, the content is fascinating. This is not my area of expertise, nor even interest, yet I enjoyed paddling in philosophical waters. It is a