
This superb little book offers a wealth of information, practical advice and food for thought for all trainees in critical care. It will be useful for students and doctors preparing for their first exposure to intensive care, or for more experienced trainees needing essential and concise information.

There are 16 chapters. Topics covered range from ‘Organizational Issues’ (including the role of outreach teams), through considerations of critical illness by physiological systems (e.g. cardiovascular, renal), to ‘End of Life Issues’. There is a chapter on practical procedures, which provides brief but comprehensive lists of indications, contraindications and complications, as well as descriptions of how to perform the procedures. The descriptions are clear, and accompanied by practical advice on what to do when you are having difficulty.

Throughout the book, the presentation is clear, the information relevant and generally up-to-date, and the diagrams and tables appealing to look at. There are ‘pop up’ boxes marked by exclamation marks (!) that provide little nuggets of extra information, or precautions, or tell the reader to ask for extra help. Practical and pragmatic advice is given in a reassuring tone (e.g. listen to the nurses, talk to patients).

Of course, such a practical book (it could fit easily into a white coat pocket), cannot provide everything the trainee needs for a complete experience in intensive care. It is inevitably didactic and inevitably I sometimes disagreed with the approach. There are no references included, presumably to keep the book’s size down, but their absence detracts from the book’s educational weight. Some points which may be debated on ward rounds are skimmed over too easily (e.g. choice of inotropes). However, that said, I would not hesitate to highly recommend this book to my trainees. It is remarkably complete, relevant and reassuring.

While reading this book will not make anyone an intensivist overnight, it will prepare them well to take on the day-to-day problems and dilemmas that will arise in the intensive care unit and on the wards.

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This edition of Therapeutics is a thin, A4 size, multi-authored book, edited by Andrew R. Webb (University College, London), covering the topic of i.v. fluid therapy. The Therapeutics series is produced by Braun and published by Aesculap Academia. Copies of this book can only be obtained from B. Braun Medical Ltd (Thorncliffe Park, Sheffield S35 2PW, UK). The aims of the publication are to ‘provide a comprehensive review, by leading experts in the field, of the current state of knowledge and understanding about the clinical uses of these pharmaceuticals, and point towards future developments’. Blood transfusion and blood products, other than albumin, are not, however, included. The book consists of 10 chapters, the largest of which is only 14 pages in length. The text is well spaced and broken by bold subheadings, allowing it to be easily read. There is an appropriate bibliography at the end of each chapter containing three to seven additional sources, but the text itself is not referenced. The figures and tables are clear and easy to interpret, but greater use of the extensive white space could have been made with a publication such as this in A4 format.

The first chapter gives a brief outline of the history of i.v. fluid therapy from the 15th century to the present day. Included are Grönwall’s (1957) eight requirements for an ideal colloid solution. The next chapter deals with the choice of i.v. fluid. It contains some basic physiology of fluid compartments, fluid shifts and oedema, principles underlying fluid administration, and a list of factors to consider in choosing an appropriate fluid. The third chapter, written by Peter Gosling (a clinical scientist in Birmingham), covers the pathophysiology of capillary leak, looking at causes and possible implications. The following five chapters deal with the properties and use of crystalloids, albumin, gelatins, hydroxyethyl starches, and artificial oxygen carriers. Shumita Joseph and Gilbert Park (Cambridge) tackle the controversial topic of albumin in Chapter 5. This chapter has been kept to six pages despite the vast literature available, and includes details of the three purported indications for its use (paracentesis in cirrhotic patients; after liver transplantation; and for extracorporeal albumin dialysis). Sadly, in common with all the chapters, it is not fully referenced. Joachim Boldt (Germany) has written Chapter 7 on the subject of hydroxyethyl starches. This chapter handles the similarities, differences and complications well, with tables and illustrations, but five comparative graphs have been reduced onto one side of A4. It is interesting that artificial oxygen carriers are included in this slim volume, and have their own six-page chapter, authored by Donat Spahn and Roman Kocian (Switzerland). This chapter is devoid of figures and tables, which may have helped to clarify the points under discussion. Clinical problems arising from i.v. fluid therapy are covered by Edward Burdett and Monty Mythen (London), in Chapter 9. Some of these problems have been dealt with in earlier chapters. This chapter also lacks any comparative tables that would have helped to summarize use of the fluids mentioned in the preceding chapters. Monitoring is the subject of the final chapter. The importance of diagnosing hypovolaemia is stressed by Andrew Webb, and ‘the fluid challenge’ is covered in some detail.

This is a comprehensive review in that several well recognized authorities cover all the regularly used i.v. fluids, and some experimental ones too, but it lacks full referencing and explanation of certain points and opinions. It is clearly not designed to be a referenced tome, but is more of a light refreshment for the rather dry topic of fluid therapy. At only £6.50, it is probably an attractive proposition for senior house officers, in anaesthetics or critical care, to dispose of some of their liquid assets.

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