Monitoring and equipment has an editorial on new technology applied to anaesthesia and critical care followed by: equipment for cardiopulmonary resuscitation, computers in anaesthesia, simulation, and new intubation equipment.

Critical care has an editorial on vasopressin followed by: serious medical errors in the ICU, the surviving sepsis campaign, glycaemic control, and hypothermia after cardiac arrest.

Each of the topics addresses 12–20 recently published articles using the structure described above. The authors in their discussion cite related articles and provide a full reference list for each topic and provide a concluding overview of the subject at the end of the chapter. The choice of articles is comprehensive for each of the topics chosen and the quality of the assessment/commentary is uniformly high.

The two questions to be asked and answered in any book review are: is this book useful and who will find it useful?

In answer to the first, it is my opinion that this structure works well and provides the reader with a thorough update on current clinical topics by highlighting important recent publications and providing a commentary which helps to put them into context.

In answer to the second point, the broad range of subjects covered makes this relevant to most clinicians. In a foreword to the book, Sir Peter Simpson describes this book’s concept as one of book-based CME. This fits well with the idea of providing busy clinicians with a guided tour of recent publications on a specific subject by giving them the basics of the study, its results, and comment on the findings, thereby allowing them to draw conclusions on its value.

I think this book provides useful continuing education for clinicians established in practice and will also be of value to trainees preparing for professional examinations.

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This atlas is a new publication and follows the author’s previous work The Primer of Regional Anesthesia Anatomy. Like its predecessor, this atlas has an accompanying DVD to further illustrate the anatomy and nerve blocks described in the text.

The book is divided into chapters describing each nerve block and each section is preceded by an overview of the appropriate anatomy related to it. As might be expected from the title, the emphasis is on limb blocks, but a chapter on paravertebral blocks is also included.

The author does not try to provide a comprehensive review of all available nerve blocks, but attempts to demonstrate an effective reliable method of blocking each nerve. This has the advantage of brevity and avoids the need for discussion about the merits of different techniques, but it does mean that the scope of the book is limited, for example, a lateral approach to the popliteal nerve is not mentioned. The author also acknowledges that his recommendations are ‘not strictly evidence based’ and there may not be universal agreement about some of the statements, for example, ‘hip replacement is not a good indication for psoas compartment block’.

The book itself is lavishly illustrated, perhaps too much so, in that some of the diagrams could have been amalgamated. This would have reduced the need to flick backwards and forwards while reading the text, although using the DVD largely overcomes this problem. I feel that the number of cadaver dissections illustrated could also have been reduced. In some, it was not clear what the anatomical relationships were and I do not feel they add anything to the practical aspect of learning blocks. Readers would probably be better consulting specialist anatomy texts if they need more detail. A useful feature is the sonograms which cover most of the areas of interest and these will become more relevant as ultrasound-guided nerve blocks become the norm.

There is also significant space devoted to continuous blocks, perhaps reflecting the book’s American background.

In general, the descriptions on how to perform the blocks are clear and concise, as are the clinical demonstrations on the DVD. The layout of the book is slightly irritating in that some effort is required to find out which is the appropriate block for a particular procedure, but again the DVD is helpful. There are a few spelling and grammatical errors which have escaped the proof-readers.

Overall, this is an attractive, well written, and useful book. It is perhaps more suitable as a study guide rather than as an ABC manual, since in most cases the text needs to be studied carefully before a block is undertaken.

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There is certainly a need for a book such as this. Undergraduate knowledge of obstetric practice seems to be diminishing and we cannot provide analgesia or anaesthesia