
This book is produced by the editor and contributors responsible for Kaplan’s Cardiac Anesthesia which is arguably the standard reference text for cardiac anaesthesia. Essentials is basically a concise version of the current edition of Kaplan, which was published in 2006. This could therefore be viewed as the publishing equivalent of a blockbuster movie being released on DVD.

The book is in six sections: I, Preoperative Evaluation, including diagnostic and interventional catheter laboratory procedures; II, Cardiovascular Physiology, Pharmacology and Molecular Biology; III, Monitoring, with an emphasis on transoesophageal echocardiography; IV, Anaesthesia for Cardiac Surgical Procedures; V, Extracorporeal Circulation; and VI, Postoperative Care and Pain Management. The book incorporates most of the clinical material contained in Kaplan, but omits non-essential material such as the section on the history of cardiac surgery and cardiac anaesthesia. Liberal use is made of teaching boxes containing ‘take home messages’ and there is a bullet point summary at the end of each chapter. The reference list for each chapter has been limited to a small number of key articles. There is an abundance of illustrations, diagrams, clinical images, and tables. Although not pocket size, the book is reasonably portable and would definitely fit in the bag of, for example, an anaesthetic registrar doing a cardiothoracic attachment.

Section I contains an interesting account of the development of intracoronary stents. Did you know, for instance, that the Taxus drug-eluting stent uses a polymer coating to deliver paclitaxel, a drug derived from the Pacific yew tree Taxus brevifolia? The section also contains a review of percutaneous coronary intervention (PCI) vs coronary artery bypass grafting (CABG) in patients with multivessel coronary disease. It describes lower initial costs with PCI but with convergence by 5 yr because of repeat PCI procedures precipitated by restenosis and with a long-term survival favouring CABG. Chapter 10, Intraoperative echocardiography, is the longest in the book and leaves the reader in no doubt that the ability to perform intraoperative transoesophageal echocardiography is a core skill for the North American cardiac anaesthetist. The chapter ends with a series of case studies highlighting common clinical scenarios encountered by the anaesthetist echocardiographer, for example, the management of previously undiagnosed aortic stenosis in a patient undergoing coronary artery bypass surgery.

Chapter 19, Cardiac Pacing and Defibrillation, offers a clear, common sense approach to the patient with, or who may require, an implantable pulse generator. The authors make the point that the complexity of modern devices limits the number of generalizations that can be made about the perioperative care of such patients.

My main reservation about this book is the index. A number of important subjects that receive good coverage in the main text do not feature in the index, for instance, acid–base management during bypass. Some other subjects are not logically indexed. Acute renal failure is indexed under A, whereas I initially looked under R for renal failure, acute. However, this is a relatively minor criticism and the overall clear layout means that the required information can be found by looking in the relevant section of the book when not featured in the index.

In summary, this book is packed with information and advice relating to patients with cardiac disease undergoing both cardiac and non-cardiac surgeries. It represents tremendous value for money and I would have no hesitation in recommending it to all anaesthetists.

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This book was first published in 1987 and has rapidly become a standard UK textbook for those trainees in intensive care medicine. It now appears in its third edition and is larger, fully updated with an emphasis on evidence-based practice. It has clear guidelines on the management of specific conditions. Unlike many of the larger textbooks, it retains an easily readable and uniform style, I think because it continues to be entirely written by the two authors rather than going down the more usual route of an editorial team.

This new edition has been extensively revised and expanded. There is considerable emphasis on the basic sciences in this textbook and most sections have a well-written introduction into the relevant physiology and biochemistry. Each chapter is well illustrated with mainly two tone figures and tables, although, in places, there are quite high-quality black and white photographs of X-rays and other imaging procedures.

The first two chapters cover areas that are frequently neglected in other textbooks of intensive care medicine—