BOOK REVIEWS


The authors, in their preface, ask the question ‘why another textbook of anaesthesiology?’. Their stated aim was to produce a book that could be read cover to cover by trainees, but also serve as a succinct reference for more experienced readers. In my opinion, it fulfils these aims well. It is a large paperback book of an urban telephone directory size (1060 pages, 2.4 kg); so, it is not easily portable without a large case or bag. It is well illustrated in three tone colours (black, white, and blue). Authors are almost exclusively from the USA, mainly Boston, and the style and content reflects their practice.

The book is divided into 29 sections and 184 chapters. Most of the chapters are much shorter than traditional texts at two to four pages each, allowing for short periods of focused study. This will appeal to the trainee or specialist in need of a brief revision of the area. There are good reviews of the basic science elements relating to anaesthetic pharmacology, physiology, monitoring, and applied physics. Thereafter, all of the major areas of anaesthetic practice in adults and children are covered, including surgery for all body areas. I could not identify any major areas of deficiency, accepting that the level of detail varies considerably between sections. This is inevitable when a single book tries to cover such a wide area of practice.

Of interest, the last section comprising some 18 chapters is not within the book itself but is freely accessible online at www.cambridge.org/vacanti (last accessed November 12, 2011). I am uncertain whether this online section was planned from the outset, or came about later due to excess pages for one print volume. There are some interesting and more advanced topics in this section, for example, addiction in anaesthetic providers, anaesthesia in flight, clinical innovation and engineered vigilance, and anaesthetic informatics. This section provides a very accessible and useful insight into the style of the book for those interested in reading or acquiring the book.

The book is obviously aimed at US trainees, but it will I believe be used by trainees in other countries, including the UK. Some of the chapters, which might traditionally have been seen as irrelevant to the UK trainee, are now increasingly pertinent and worth reading in their own right as they are generally not mentioned in the UK literature, for example, office-based anaesthesia, efficient operating theatre management, and financial aspects of practice management. Similarly, there are good sections on patient safety, quality assurance, and risk management.

Although primarily an anaesthetic textbook, there is a section on pain management, including 10 chapters on various aspects of chronic pain. Similarly, there is a section on intensive care with 15 chapters giving a good introduction to the subject, albeit more from the perspective of an anaesthetist attending a patient on the intensive care unit rather than as a resident doctor. I particularly liked the ethics chapter, where the concept of ‘Middleman’ is explained. These are members of the healthcare team, including anaesthetic trainees, who may disagree with aspects of a patient’s care which they believe is not in the patient’s best interests, but because of their position in the hierarchy are restricted or unable to express their views in relation to such decision-making. This is a problem that is widespread throughout anaesthetic practice, particularly when the patient is seen late immediately before a planned procedure.

The book has a contemporary feel taking in all aspects of newer anaesthetic techniques like ultrasound guidance and echocardiography. Similarly, surgical advances like endovascular repair of aortic aneurysm and robotic surgery are covered.

I believe that this will become an established text internationally. Its size, price, and content is somewhere between the smaller handbook/pocketbook texts and the large multivolume definitive textbooks. Many trainees will purchase their own copy and it would be a valuable addition to department libraries.

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The podcast series, used as a revision aid for the Primary FRCA, have been available to download from the Internet for a number of years. For those readers not familiar with them, they are a series of 90 short podcasts covering various topics focusing on preparation for the structured viva part of the Primary FRCA. The authors have taken the next step in publishing this book, which contains all the podcasts in a printed format.

The book is laid out in a logical manner with three sections, the first on physiology, the second pharmacology, and the final section being physics. An index is included at the end of the book. Each section contains ~30 individual chapters covering a particular topic from the syllabus for the Primary FRCA. Each chapter is presented as a series of questions with accompanying answers. The number of