

This textbook was conceived with the objective of providing a slimmed-down version of Barash’s heavyweight ‘Clinical Anesthesia’ seventh edition, targeted at trainees early in their anaesthetic career. It weighs in at around half the price (£71 vs £154) and bulk (912 vs 1880 pages) of its parent. The authors’ stated goal is to appeal to ‘digitally native’ students through multiple complementary methods of delivering content, and this is immediately apparent on opening the book. Figures are crisp, colourful, and clearly labelled. Facts of particular import are highlighted in contrasting ‘Did You Know?’ boxes, and each chapter ends with a selection of multiple choice questions to reinforce the knowledge just encountered. Alongside the book comes complementary access to an e-book version of the entire text, which can be opened via Web browser, iPad, or Android app. This unlocks access to 130 short video tutorials, signposted from the relevant textbook page, on topics from coronary perfusion to laryngoscopy.

The text is organized into four sections. The first provides a brief but interesting history of the early pioneers of anaesthesia and the development of the specialty. Section two, ‘Scientific and Technical Foundations of Anaesthesia’, comprises the basic sciences of anatomy, physiology, pharmacology, and ‘technology’, namely anaesthetic machines, circuits, and monitoring. Some of the figures in the pharmacology section are difficult to master, and there is little of the physics required by those sitting the primary FRCA. Reflecting its American origins, the section on equipment lacks British idiosyncrasies, such as the Mapleson classification of circuits, and the guidelines provided for machine check and failed intubation are those provided by the ASA rather than the Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland.

Section three, ‘Clinical Practice of Anaesthesia’, contains the bulk of the book. There are chapters describing anaesthetic management for all the expected surgical specialties, including pain, trauma, and critical care, with several interesting additions. ‘Preoperative Evaluation and Management’ includes details of the ASA classification, an explanation of metabolic equivalents, flow charts guiding investigation of the high-risk cardiac patient, and recommendations for perioperative management of diabetes and corticosteroid coverage. The World Health Organization’s Surgical Safety Checklist is introduced and its importance emphasized.

‘Patient Positioning and Potential Injuries’ provides an excellent overview of the pitfalls of incorrect positioning, often overlooked by the junior trainee. The section on regional anaesthesia is well laid out, with clear anatomical diagrams, images of the relevant sono-anatomy, and patient and probe positioning. Video clips of the various nerve blocks can be accessed through the e-book.

A chapter on ‘Complications, Risk Management, Patient Safety and Liability’ explores morbidity and mortality related to anaesthesia, with particular emphasis on medical errors and non-technical skills. The latter part of this chapter is specific to the American health system, with a particular focus on the law and litigation that is of limited relevance to non-American trainees, although this may change in the future. An interesting addition is a chapter on ‘Wellness Principles’. This introduces the concept of burnout and explores the perils of substance misuse and how to deal with stress. These are important but under-recognized issues, and the authors are to be applauded for their inclusion in a text aimed at those early in their careers.

The fourth and last section comprises a selection of appendices. These cover a diverse range of topics, including ECG interpretation, (American) resuscitation protocols, guidelines, airway algorithms, and a guide to common herbal medications.

In summary, there is much to recommend. This is an accessible, well-written and attractively laid out textbook. The ability to access the contents in their entirety via e-book allows trainees to study from the textbook at home and to look up topics of interest on their phone in the workplace, and the video tutorials bring otherwise dry topics to life. Owing to its American origins, many of the guidelines and algorithms differ slightly from those in use in the UK, and the lack of a section on physics and some omissions within the pharmacology chapters mean that it cannot be recommended as a sole text for UK trainees studying for the primary FRCA.

J. Rae and G. McLeod
Dundee, UK
E-mail: g.a.mcleod@dundee.ac.uk

doi:10.1093/bja/aev382