BOOK REVIEWS


This book, described as a textbook and reference source, is edited by two specialist dermatologists, one British, one American, who each have interests in occupational or contact dermatitis. It forms one of a series of specialized dermatology texts edited by Professor Maibach and is probably intended mainly for a specialist dermatology readership.

There are 22 chapters in its 270 pages, written by 26 authors. Although there is an international flavour, most authors are British or American. The single section on occupational health management is written by a British occupational physician. All the issues pertaining to latex intolerance are dealt with in-depth, covering the science, epidemiology and management of irritant contact dermatitis as well as type 1 and type 4 allergic contact dermatitis. There is a great deal of authoritative detail and an extensive reference list for those who want to look further. The narrative style is variable as would be expected from multiple authors, and ranges from enjoyably readable to densely inaccessible. There is an irritating degree of repetition with several chapters covering identical or similar ground and the same references reappearing. There are probably too many chapters and these vary tremendously in length—from barely more than a page up to 38 pages long (e.g. Management of rubber-based allergies in dentistry). Further judicious editing would have improved the book considerably without losing quality.

Despite these flaws, the addition of a text devoted to the various forms of latex intolerance is welcome and timely. Though it could serve as a useful reference for occupational physicians, at £109 this book is expensive and may attract only those OH departments who have a special interest in the topic.

Rating

☆☆☆ (Borrow from the library)

Alexander Elder


This book constitutes the proceedings of the symposium of the same title on the 30 March 2004 at the Royal Society of Medicine. The object of the symposium was to address questions about the health of workers in this country and the responsiveness of the health care system to their special needs, including the treatment of workers to maximise the benefit to employers and the economy. It also addressed four specific diseases in detail: back pain, mental health issues, asthma and cardiac rehabilitation.

The book is split into three sections: Setting the Scene, Possible Solutions and Evidence of Good Practice, with variably four or five chapters in each section. In Setting the Scene, the public health effects of ‘needless unemployment’ (including a summary of the history of the problem), the costs for industry from different perspectives, and the effects on the nation’s economy as a whole are discussed in depth, both in text and also well-presented figures. The next section, Possible Solutions, looks at the problem from international, primary care, and occupational health perspectives, in each area looking at how each player can contribute to solving the problem. In addition it addresses possible obstacles to
solutions. The final section, Evidence of Good Practice, discusses the effects of interventions for each of the chosen four health conditions in detail. It is clear within these areas that rehabilitation is moving forward with a variety of different programmes in place, but overall there is much still to be done to highlight the importance of rehabilitation to primary and secondary care and to employers.

The high-level contributors to the symposium were clearly well informed. The text is interspersed with useful figures and so refreshingly accessible and easy to read. This is a very useful book which outlines the scale and breadth of the sickness absence and morbidity problems facing industry and the economy in the UK today. It is well-written, well set out and logical. The referencing is comprehensive and I did not disagree with any of the assertions in the book.

In summary, although there is no specified target audience detailed in the book, I feel that this is a good book for practising occupational physicians and management alike: certainly it was well-received when I showed it to my managing director and general manager. In my opinion, at £20, it is rather expensive for the size of the volume, but in mitigation, it is a treasure trove of useful statistics on sickness absence, return to work, and the costs to employers and other nuggets of information. I am certain that I will be referring to it in communication with clients and in teaching colleagues.

Rating
☆☆☆☆ (Buy, read and keep)

Euan Thompson