

Pharmacognosy and natural products

'*Trease and Evans pharmacognosy*', 15th edition, by William Charles Evans. Pp xiii+585. Price £59.95. London: Elsevier Science; 2002. ISBN 0 7020 26174.

Trease and Evans pharmacognosy is a stalwart pharmacognosy text, and one that continues to bring fresh material to each edition. This new edition also comprises larger pages, clearer fonts, and an improved page layout which, altogether, significantly enhance the presentation of the text, chemical structures, figures and so on.

It has been extensively revised in line with the continuing interest and developments in the use of plants as medicines and in plants as sources of new drugs. There is a new chapter on production of crude drugs which discusses factors such as environmental conditions, cultivated versus wild plants, collection, drying, storage and other factors that can influence the profile and concentration of active constituents in plant material. A particular strength of the book is the extensive (300 pages), comprehensive section "Pharmacopoeial and related drugs of biological origin" which, for example, includes a 60-page chapter on alkaloids.

The book continues to include specialist chapters by invited authors, and these, particularly the one on antiprotozoal compounds, have been updated to some extent. There are also several invited chapters which are new for this edition. These include an interesting, albeit short, chapter on commerce in crude (plant) drugs that outlines historical developments and provides an insightful account of current issues, such as changing supply patterns.

There is an excellent chapter on synergy and polyvalent action in herbal medicinal products — what these terms mean, how they can be measured, and what evidence there is of both enhancement of activity and attenuation of toxicity in various medicinal plants.

Another new chapter describes traditional plant medicines as sources of new drugs, reflecting the importance of "ethnic" or "cultural" use of plant remedies in the discovery of novel pharmaceuticals. The chapter describes this ethnopharmacological

approach to drug discovery, provides several examples of newer compounds that have emerged from this process, and also considers its limitations. The use of high throughput screening in the discovery of new lead compounds from plants is also the subject of a new chapter.

This 15th edition continues to recognise the importance of, and sustained public interest in and demand for, "alternative" systems of medicine, such as Chinese, Asian and African traditional medicine, which use plant-based preparations in their treatments. Several chapters provide good summaries of these systems, with a focus on composition and activities of substances used and, to a lesser extent, some issues relevant to pharmacy, such as the legal background to "western" herbal medicines and those included on the general sales list.

In my view, the effort that has gone into this new edition of Trease and Evans illustrates the continuing contribution that plants make to the development of pharmaceuticals and thus the importance of pharmacognosy and natural products in pharmacy.

Jo Barnes

Advice for job-hunting pharmacists

'*The pharmacy professional's guide to résumés, CVs & interviewing*', by Thomas P. Reinders. Pp ix+144. Price £21.50. Washington: American Pharmaceutical Association; 2001. ISBN 1 58212 016 1.

If you can get past the Americanisms and references to United States organisations in this comprehensive guidebook, you will discover some real gems of information. The book is packed full of sample curricula vitae, covering letters and useful keywords for job-hunting pharmacists. The guidance given in the first two chapters of the book is perhaps redundant because in the United Kingdom, CVs rather than the résumés described are the norm. However, chapter two does contain a comprehensive list of verbs that can be equally applied when compiling a CV.

Three chapters are devoted to preparing for and "performing" at interview. Although chapter seven offers guidance and advice about interviewing that most readers will have heard before, the table on "evaluating position offers" is a novel idea. The table addresses the rather privileged position of a candidate receiving multiple job offers. Factors that the author suggests candidates should consider when making a decision about a job include lifestyle issues, compensation and the match between a candidate's skills and attitudes and the organisation making the job offer. Chapter eight is also practical because it provides a comprehensive list of questions that candidates can ask at interview.

The book is written and structured in an easy to read style and should make job hunting a less laborious task.

Ruth McGuire

A concise and accurate overview of pharmacology

'*Medical pharmacology at a glance*' (4th edition), by M. J. Neal. Pp 102. Price £12.95. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd; 2002. ISBN 0 632 05244 9.

Like a well known brand of DIY products, this book does exactly what it says on the label. It provides an "at-a-glance" summary of pharmacology in 45 easily digested, bite-sized chunks.

Each topic is allotted a single diagram and it and the accompanying text are contained within two pages. Text is kept to a minimum, and is largely in the form of an extended legend to the diagram. In the preface the author recommends a three-stage journey towards pharmacological enlightenment. First the student is advised to read the short introductory paragraph using the diagram as a guide. Second, working through the figure with its accompanying legend will cement understanding. Once this is achieved, a glance at the figure will reinforce memory.

However much students might wish it otherwise, some topics are inherently complicated. The danger with any treatment as brief as this is that simplification leads to distortion. There is no room for uncertainty or ambiguity. The author is denied the luxury of speculation and the space to set out alternative views or hypotheses. He must deal largely with the "what" and hope that the interested student will be stimulated to look elsewhere for the "how" and "why". Professor Neal is to be congratulated on avoiding this trap. The writing is sharp, terse and unambiguous.

At first glance, some of the diagrams appear complicated but careful study, guided by the accompanying legend, shows them to be logical and clear.

In this latest edition, drug names conform to the European directive on the use of Recommended International Non-proprietary Names. The most noticeable change for the United Kingdom reader is that from noradrenaline to norepinephrine and from adrenaline to epinephrine.

Again referring to the preface, the author, although acknowledging that the book is primarily aimed at medical students, dares to hope that it will also prove useful to students in other disciplines. Unscientific observation of the high proportion of my own students — of pharmacy, pharmacology and natural sciences — clutching copies of Professor Neal's book, particularly in the run up to examinations, leads me to believe that his hope will be realised.

Any student wanting a concise and accurate overview of pharmacology could do no better than start with this book. Some may find the monochrome diagrams a little dull compared to the technicolour three-dimensional offerings of some transatlantic competitors, but at £12.95, this book is a snip!

Peter Redfern

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