

## Those with an interest in veterinary pharmacy will find title relevant

'Zoonoses' 1st edition, by Martin Shakespeare. Pp xii+285. Price £29.95. London: Pharmaceutical Press; 2002. ISBN 0 85369 480 X.

The World Health Organization defines zoonoses as "those diseases and infections which are naturally transmitted between vertebrate animals and man". Thus some mosquito-borne diseases, such as malaria, which do not have an animal reservoir are not included under the definition, whereas others, such as yellow fever, which can be found in monkeys are zoonotic infections. The definition becomes somewhat blurred when applied to food-borne diseases.

All the relevant viral, parasitic, bacterial and prion-related conditions are comprehensively covered. Chapters are organised logically into the principal animal host groups (domestic or agricultural), food-borne infections, diseases of high mortality, such as Ebola virus, and emerging infections like the Nipha virus. The conditions are presented in a standardised format of transmission, incidence, life cycle, disease presentation in humans and animals, prevention and treatment. Useful case studies are given at the end of each chapter.

Media exposure has created public concern and confusion about zoonoses such as Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease, *Escherichia coli* infection and West Nile Virus. This book provides useful material for any non-specialist health care professional, particularly the practising pharmacist, who may need to address such questions. The current debate concerning level of risk and means of protection from these conditions are clearly laid out. I would anticipate that the book is of particular interest to those who are involved with any veterinary aspects of pharmacy. Also a number of the diseases covered are of relevance to travel medicine.

Larry Goodyer

## A useful book on balance but has some gaps and omissions

'Herbal medicine' 2nd edition, by Joanne Barnes, Linda A. Anderson, J. David Phillipson. Pp xiv+530. Price £39.95. London: Pharmaceutical Press; 2002. ISBN 0 85369 474 5. Also available as CD-ROM, price £75.00. ISBN 0 85369 500 8.

The first edition of this book has already been highly successful, and one can assume that this second edition will be similarly valued. Pharmacists' need for factual information in the area of herbal medicines has grown in parallel with the acceptance of these remedies by consumers. The second edition is an extended and updated version

of the first. It contains 148 monographs of medicinal plants in alphabetical order written by pharmacists for pharmacists. The structure of the monographs is logical, the information provided is concise and relevant, and the scope of the plants covered is laudable.

Even though the book is undoubtedly useful it also has, in my view, several flaws. First, there is no methods section (or equivalent) to inform the reader which information was included and which was excluded. Thus we cannot be certain that the approach used was systematic. In fact, several spot checks indicated to me that it is not truly systematic.

Secondly, the data presented (eg, results of clinical trials) are reported without critical evaluation. A study of a herbal medicine may yield a positive result because the remedy was effective or because the methodology was flawed. The authors of this book make no real attempt to differentiate between the two scenarios. This leaves the critical reader with a level of uncertainty that is both regrettable and avoidable.

Thirdly, this book lacks consistency. For instance, the section on clinical studies is included in some but not all monographs largely independent of the existence or absence of such data in the literature. Often the results of clinical studies, sometimes of highly dubious quality, are described. In other cases important clinical trials or systematic reviews are not mentioned at all. Such inconsistency is confusing and leads me to suspect that the research for this book was not as thorough as it could have been.

Fourthly, no clinical judgements are provided that could guide therapeutic decisions. Pharmacists, I imagine, want to know not only that herb *x* works for condition *y* but also whether its benefits outweigh its risks and, more importantly, how this risk-benefit profile compares to that of a conventional treatment option.

When I weigh the many strong points of this book against its few but important weaknesses, my final verdict is clearly positive. What we have here is a good reference text that will be of interest to most pharmacists. I therefore recommend it to these professionals. More clinically orientated professionals or individuals who look for critical assessments of the primary data, however, might want to look elsewhere.

Edzard Ernst

### THIS WEEK'S REVIEWERS

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## Designed for medical students but useful for all health practitioners

'Oxford textbook of clinical pharmacology and drug therapy' 3rd edition, by David G. Grahame-Smith and Jeffrey K. Aronson. Pp xiv+641. Price £29.50. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2002. ISBN 0 19 263234 5.

This is the third version of this textbook and, as before, the contents are aimed primarily at medical students. However, with the many changes that may occur to prescribing habits in the future, and in particular to the predicted broadening of the groups involved in prescribing, such a text will be of interest to other health practitioners.

As for the second edition, the new version is organised into four major and convenient sections dealing with the scientific basis of drug therapy, practical prescribing, the drug therapy of disease and includes a pharmacopoeia. All are produced with the help of a panel of expert co-authors.

The fact that a third edition has been produced is testimony to the value of the textbook and in general the authors should be congratulated on the clarity of the text. The book achieves a good blend of clinical detail, including pharmacological disease management and advice, while not completely ignoring the underlying mechanisms of actions of drugs. Importantly, there are numerous links to other reference sources and textbooks.

For any textbook aspiring to reach a wide audience, there are two important benchmarks that it must be measured against. These are, is it sufficiently attractive for students to take it off the shelf and read it without becoming disinterested or feeling unable to engage in the text? The visual aspect of the text and style of writing is important. Secondly, and particularly for undergraduate texts, is the index sufficiently detailed, so that most issues can be readily accessed almost as a reference source?

On both counts the book passes easily. On the former question, the text is quite clear and considers the clinical options. It seems that it will hold interest although after a while the reddish hue to every diagram does become overly familiar and the use of additional colours (costs allowing) would be welcomed. Regarding the latter question of the index, this also appears quite detailed and the only omission that I found was for "power calculations", which is featured in sufficient detail in the clinical trials chapter.

Finally the pharmacopoeia is drawn from a list of approximately 300 compounds in mainstream clinical use (presumably the authors' choice) and helpfully includes the structure of many drugs.

Overall, the text is well presented and I believe a worthy addition for medical libraries. It will be a useful guide particularly for medical students and even, I would suggest, for those who have qualified.

Trevor G. Smart