

Well-written but lacking critique of how NICE guidance fits in

'Evidence-based pharmacy', by Phil Wiffen. Pp iv+182. Price £19.95. London: Radcliffe Medical Press Ltd; 2001. ISBN 1 85775 384 4.

This is a clear and well-written book which addresses the important concept of evidence-based care and practice. It is written by a pharmacist with expertise and considerable experience in this area through his work within the Cochrane collaboration framework. The book is divided into 10 chapters which take the reader through a logical sequence, starting with the relevance of evidence-based care to contemporary pharmacy practice. For practitioners and students new to this area, there is a clear and informative section on using both established databases (such as Medline) and a chapter largely devoted to the effective use of the Internet to access evidence.

Following on from an explanation of the techniques used in systematic reviews and meta-analyses there is an invaluable chapter that explains the concepts and types of statistical analyses used within these techniques (including number needed to treat, odds ratios and quality adjusted life years). In the chapter on "appraising the evidence", there is clear guidance on how to assess the quality of the evidence and critically appraise the literature. These are skills which are essential for all pharmacists who, in this era of evidence-based medicine, must be research users if they are to be credible practitioners. A later chapter also addresses the imperative to strengthen pharmacy practice research and for pharmacists to become generators of evidence, as well as users.

The only real omission of note in this book is a critique of how practitioners should assimilate the guidance emanating from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence and the National Service Frameworks into this evidence-based paradigm. This is a real-life dilemma faced by all those in clinical practice. It is to be hoped that there will be further, updated editions of this book as this is a rapidly evolving area in this era of guidelines, targets and quality indicators.

Judith Cantrill

Comprehensive and detailed resource for all pharmacy staff

'Complementary therapies for pharmacists', by Steven B. Kayne. Pp xiv+425. Price £24.95. London: Pharmaceutical Press; 2002. ISBN 0 853 69430 3.

Steven Kayne has been a leading figure in complementary medicine and its applications to pharmacy for many years, and his

wide experience in this area makes him an appropriate and erudite author for this handbook.

The book is organised in four parts. The first, a substantial overview of complementary/alternative medicine (CAM), includes detailed discussion of how CAM is defined and classified, the "holistic" approach of CAM therapies, the extent of and reasons for their use, and how CAM is organised in the United Kingdom.

Pharmacists will find part two of the book particularly useful because it considers, in separate chapters, the therapies — homoeopathy, anthroposophy, medical herbalism, aromatherapy and flower remedy therapy — that have most relevance to the pharmacy environment. For each of these, background, practice, evidence, safety and other relevant topics are covered in some depth. In a similar, albeit less detailed, format, parts three and four cover "ethnic" traditional therapies, eg, traditional Chinese medicine, and Ayurveda and other CAM disciplines, eg, naturopathy, manual therapies, mind and body therapies, respectively.

These chapters do not inform pharmacists how to become practitioners of these therapies — they are not intended to — but they do provide the necessary guidance to aid pharmacists in advising patients on their safe, effective and appropriate use. In addition, community pharmacists will find particularly useful practical information on, for example, how to supply and endorse prescriptions for homoeopathic remedies, and how strengths of herbal liquid extracts are expressed. I am also pleased to see the inclusion of sections on phytochemical constituents, because it is important that pharmacists view herbal medicines as complex chemical mixtures. The evidence for complementary medicines and therapies is also considered, sometimes only briefly, but to do otherwise (eg, for every herbal remedy) would be beyond the scope of the book. For a future edition, the herbal repertory could be improved because it is brief and not entirely consistent with the evidence, for example, ginkgo and not St John's wort is listed for depression.

For the most part, this book provides a detailed and comprehensive resource that

will provide the pharmacist and pharmacy counter staff with the background and information needed to be able to advise patients and the public on the safe, effective and appropriate use of complementary medicines and therapies. Importantly, the author has an easy writing style that encourages the reader to dip into the book out of interest, not just out of necessity.

Jo Barnes

Product selection hints useful yet lack of evidence acknowledged

'Non-prescription medicines', 2nd edition, by Alan Nathan. Pp xiii+384. Price £24.95. London: Pharmaceutical Press; 2002. ISBN 0 85369 506 7.

With increasing opportunities for prescribing of more powerful drugs over the counter the need for guidance is becoming acute and Alan Nathan's comprehensive book generally fulfils the requirement well.

This completely revised second edition assesses the range of non-prescription medicines that can be recommended for the most frequently encountered minor illnesses. Product selection hints throughout the book are particularly useful. Changes in the legal status and new approaches to treatment are both described in detail. A new section on emergency hormonal contraception has been added. The formulary style is clear with plenty of space and an interesting type face.

The author states that "the book sets out to present and objectively assess the available scientific and clinical information in order to help pharmacists and other health professionals make reasoned judgements". The lack of a single reference is surprising in an era where evidence-based medicine is an important issue. It is difficult to see how "reasoned judgements" can be achieved effectively without giving an opportunity to consult primary reference sources where they are available and indeed have been used by the author. In truth there is little scientific evidence available for many over-the-counter products, except perhaps for those subject to POM-to-P switches in recent years. To be fair, the author acknowledges this fact concluding that "in the absence of other evidence a medicine's track record in terms of sales and user satisfaction may be as good a reason for recommendation as any other". In the introduction the author talks about "health care in the United Kingdom" but some of his remarks refer only to the current position in England — beware of the marauding Scots and Welsh!

The book will be a useful addition to pharmacists' bookshelves. It will certainly be of benefit to other health professionals too and provide interesting reading to members of the public intending to self treat.

Steven Kayne

THIS WEEK'S REVIEWERS

Dr Jo Barnes is lecturer in phytopharmacy, Centre for Pharmacognosy and Phytotherapy, School of Pharmacy, University of London.

Professor Judith Cantrill is professor of Medicines, Drug Usage and Pharmacy Practice Group, School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, University of Manchester.

Dr Steven Kayne is a community pharmacist from Giffnock, Glasgow.