

BOOKS

Substantial volume yet a pleasure to read for those interested in medicines development

'The textbook of pharmaceutical medicine', 4th edition, edited by John P. Griffin and John O'Grady. Pp xi+884. Price £95. London: BMJ Books; 2002. ISBN 0 7279 1523 1.

Having agreed, by telephone, to review this publication, it was with some misgivings that I first confronted the book itself. A substantial volume was only to be expected, yet over 850 pages, with 21 chapters by 32 authors still seemed a daunting prospect. I also found the title (*'The textbook . . .'*) pretentious, and the self-congratulatory tone of the authors' preface irksome. However, the better I became acquainted with this work the more I warmed to it. It is, in fact, a very good book.

"Pharmaceutical medicine" is defined by the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Medicine of three Royal Colleges of Physicians as "a medical scientific discipline concerned with the discovery, development, evaluation, registration, monitoring and medical aspects of marketing of medicines . . .", and this book covers all these topics.

It is structured in four parts. Part I, "Research and development", includes chapters on the discovery of new medicines, pharmaceutical developments, toxicity testing, clinical pharmacokinetics, clinical trials and medical statistics. In Part II, "Medical department issues", there are chapters on medical marketing, information and promotion, supply of unlicensed medicines, legal and ethical issues, and safety. Part III is on "Regulatory aspects" and includes chapters on the historical development of the regulatory control of medicines to the year 2000, embracing United Kingdom and European Union controls, on the ICH registration process, on regulation by the US Food and Drugs Administration and

on regulation in Japan. Part IV, "Pharmacoeconomics and other issues", has two chapters: one on the economics of health care and the other on the National Health Service.

Unlike many multi-authored books, which so often are no more than loosely assembled miscellanies, this one does read like a single coherent text — a tribute to the skill of the editors. It is, of course, essential reading for those studying for the Diploma in Pharmaceutical Medicine of the Joint Faculty. It could also be read, with profit and even pleasure, by all who are interested in new medicines and the industry that develops and markets them.

John Sharp

A valuable book that, strangely, fails to explain how clinical pharmacy is practised

'Clinical pharmacy and therapeutics', 3rd edition, edited by Roger Walker and Clive Edwards. Pp xiv+937. Price £39.99. London: Elsevier Science Ltd; 2002. ISBN 0 4430 7137 3.

Slightly larger and with a slightly reduced font size, the chapters in this third edition show significant expansion on the previous volume of information and now include references to key trials. Changes in therapeutics over the past five years are reflected in the text: the British Hypertension Society Guidelines 1999; increasing evidence for dopamine agonists in Parkinson's disease, and others. The use of evidence to support statements in the text is an excellent development, particularly since it is not overplayed.

However, this book will not please all readers equally. Undergraduate students might find themselves a little swamped with information at a stage where they are unable to differentiate the important from the unimportant. Specialist pharmacists might find the text useful for teaching but less so as an information source for themselves.

Strangely enough, for a textbook with the title that it has, little information is given on how clinical pharmacy is practised, what it can achieve, and the environment of evidence base and risk management driving the new National Health Service. Key points for the pharmaceutical care of commonly encountered conditions might have been useful although some common problems with drug therapy are often mentioned.

Despite some minor niggles this book remains a unique and valuable support for all those involved or interested in drug therapy. Although sufficient information might be lacking for the specialist pharmacist, the generalist part of them should be more than satisfied with the level of information provided. This is a textbook that no university or pharmacy department, particularly those with employees studying at any level, and no pharmacist trying to develop their knowledge base should be without.

Chris Green and John Sexton

Fails to deal with main challenge of writing — what to leave out

'Writing skills in practice: a practical guide for health professionals', by Diana Williams. Pp 321. Price £15.95. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers Ltd; 2002. ISBN 1 85302 649 2.

Writing books is sheer folly: you spend months working them up, and then some self-serving critic comes along and knocks them down again.

So I apologise for any pain that this review might cause. (If it is any consolation to the author, I have been on the receiving end of wounding reviews myself in the past.) But this is just the kind of book on writing I do not care for.

Diana Williams has clearly put plenty of work into her task, covering an exceptionally broad range of topics — from taking lecture notes to time management, from information leaflets to legal implications. Many people will cherish the information.

Whether it will help writers to write and readers to read is another matter. An endless succession of bullet points fails to come to terms with the main challenge of writing (as opposed to compiling lists) — which is that it is about leaving things out, not putting them in.

Sadly there is no mention of the protagonists of polished prose, such as George Orwell, Sir Ernest Gowers, and the incomparable Strunk and White. Many of the author's phrases (sample: "Keep the health records of discharged clients for the recommended time") ignore their guidelines.

Tim Albert

THIS WEEK'S REVIEWERS

John Sharp is a retired production director and quality assurance director for the pharmaceutical industry.

Dr Chris Green is assistant director of pharmacy, clinical services, Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospitals NHS Trust.

John Sexton is principal pharmacist lecturer-practitioner at Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospitals NHS Trust and at Liverpool John Moores University.

Tim Albert runs courses on effective writing skills and is editor of 'A-Z of medical writing' (BMJ Books, 2000).