

BOOKS

## Accessible account of the legal and ethical issues around medical records

*'Medical records: use and abuse', by Heidi Tranberg and Jem Rashbass. Pp vii+173. Price £24.95. Oxford: Radcliffe Medical Press; 2004. ISBN 1 85775 604 5.*

This is a thoughtful, erudite yet accessible account of the legal and ethical issues surrounding medical records. It will be of value to those who teach would-be pharmacists, to those who set policy, give guidance or take decisions on issues of access or disclosure and to those pharmacists who simply want to be up to date in this complex and developing area of confidentiality. The authors, combining expertise in law, psychology and medicine, rightly assert that "health care is an information-rich activity" and that the march of computerisation creates opportunities to store and share vast quantities of diverse and intimate information collected for health care purposes with an increasing number of people or organisations claiming a legitimate interest in the data.

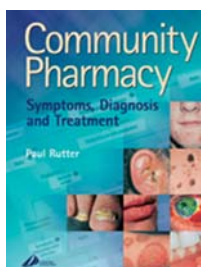
The scope of the text is comprehensive: 12 chapters range over the value of consent and technology in addressing an alleged crisis in medical privacy, through debate on whether certain forms of medical data are of special sensitivity, accounts of patient access rights, of research and freedom of information considerations and the concepts of public interest, anonymisation and pseudonymisation, to a critical review of the use of medical records in legal proceedings. Nevertheless, this book is concise enough to be read as a whole yet scholarly enough to be a useful reference book for the shelf.

Joy Wingfield

## Timely book provides a well structured guide to differential diagnosis

*'Community pharmacy symptoms, diagnosis and treatment', by Paul Rutter. Pp xiii+257. Price £29.95. Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone; 2004. ISBN 0 4430 7362 7.*

Minor ailments schemes are likely to be a major feature of the new pharmacy contracts in all four UK jurisdictions. This will require the modern community pharmacist's skill mix to include an enhanced ability to respond to symptoms. Pharmacists should be able to identify and treat common ailments effec-



tively and to distinguish them from more serious conditions that need referral.

Paul Rutter's timely book provides a well structured guide to making differential diagnoses of symptoms commonly presented by clients in community pharmacies. The comprehensive text is easy to read and there are many excellent illustrations. Prescribing advice is also provided, with the aid of charts listing appropriate doses and potential adverse reactions and interactions. None of the material in the book is directly referenced but there is plenty of suggested further reading. Self assessment questions and case studies assist in the learning process.

The 10 chapters cover a mixture of body systems (central nervous system, respiratory system), particular organs (dermatology, gastroenterology, musculoskeletal conditions, ophthalmology and otic conditions) and populations (paediatrics and women's health). A final chapter entitled "Specific product requests" covers emergency hormonal contraception, malaria prophylaxis and motion sickness. I "test-drove" the book in my pharmacy for a month and once I had sorted out the chapter content (for example dermatitis appears under dermatology while atopic dermatitis appears under paediatrics) it proved to be a valuable addition to my bookshelf. All community pharmacists — whatever their experience — will find this book an excellent continuing professional development resource. I recommend it.

Steven Kayne

## Potential to confuse rather than enthuse students

*'Handbook of basic clinical pharmacokinetics including clinical applications', 6th edition, by Wolfgang A. Ritschel and Gregory L. Kearns. Pp xii+432. Price \$54.95. Washington DC: American Pharmaceutical Association; 2004. ISBN 1 58212 054 4.*

The hardback sixth edition replaces the pocket-sized fifth edition of this popular handbook and covers a wide range of pharmacokinetic topics from the molecular level through dosage regimen design to pharmacogenetics. However, although it contains a wealth of useful information, it is poorly organised and some sections are unnecessarily complex. The impression is that new material has been added without reviewing the overall content, resulting in a disjointed layout.

The initial chapters focus on body composition, cell membranes, drug-receptor interactions and the physicochemical and physiological factors that influence pharmacokinetics. Later chapters introduce compartmental and non-compartmental modelling, dosage regimen design, drug handling in specific patient populations (eg, paediatrics) and more unusual topics, including forensic applications and a new chapter on pharmacogenetics and pharmacogenomics.

The summaries of equations are useful but some of the detail is excessive and confusing. Inappropriate terminology, such as mild renal

"failure" instead of "impairment", typing errors and confusing sections on protein binding are further irritations. The appendix contains a useful list of pharmacokinetic data for a range of drugs.

Overall, the book sacrifices clarity for quantity. It would have benefited from a reorganisation of the material into a more logical order and the removal of obsolete methodologies and drugs. It would be a useful reference for teaching purposes but may not be ideal for students as it has the potential to confuse rather than enthuse.

Alison Thomson

## Essential, authoritative text but pro/con debate would have been interesting

*'Concordance: a partnership in medicine-taking', edited by Christine Bond. Pp xv+177. Price £34.95. London: Pharmaceutical Press; 2004. ISBN 0 85369 572 5.*

Concordance is a topic regularly discussed in the pharmaceutical literature and has entered the curriculum of both undergraduate and postgraduate education. The extent to which it is practised however is unclear. This book explores this approach to clinical negotiation in the patient-practitioner relationship regarding medicine use. "Concordance" consists of several essays on this topic from varying perspectives. The chapter authors are authoritative figures who not only describe the literature but can be largely credited with having shaped it.

The opening chapter is a fascinating read that chronicles how the concept of concordance developed. Other chapters consider the patient's and professional's perspective, the pharmacist's contribution, teaching concordance to professionals, research questions to be asked and, finally, a policy framework to take forward concordance. Perhaps the neutral reader (such as this reviewer) would have liked a pro/con debate arguing vociferously for and against concordance because the contrary view is not adequately articulated in the text. Also the book would have been enriched by a chapter written by a patient. However this book is a valuable, well researched addition to the current literature. It is readable, and will be an essential, authoritative text for those educationalists, students, researchers and policy-makers interested in this area.

Rob Shulman

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