BOOK REVIEW

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In this slim, clearly-printed and well-illustrated volume, Chris Sonnex has produced the definitive desk-top reference book for busy general practitioners. This is not a heavy tome. It is an immensely readable book covering all a GP would need to know about the diagnosis and management of common genital ailments and, more importantly, giving guidelines on when to refer to a genitourinary medicine clinic.

I read this book from cover to cover, but equally well it can be used to “dip into” for a quick reference on a specific topic. Nothing has been left out of this comprehensive, but delightfully slender volume. This is not a text-book on STDs. It is a reference book on a whole variety of genital and sexual problems about which a patient may consult his GP.

One of the most useful chapters is on all those lumps, bumps and growths which occur on the genitalia, and about which we ourselves are often unsure. A short paragraph on each, illustrated by a colour photograph, is enough to inspire confidence in making one’s own diagnosis in general practice—and if we can’t, the genitourinary medicine clinic can do it for us, perhaps with the aid of a biopsy.

There is also a fine section on taking a sexual history—a difficult area for most young doctors and those inexperienced in questioning embarrassed patients about the most private and intimate aspects of their life. Of particular interest is a section on taking a sexual history from a homosexual patient. Many heterosexual doctors feel extremely uncomfortable about discussing homosexual practices and this short section suggests how to ask the all-important questions in the least invasive way.

It was pleasing to have a chapter on such basic things as cytology and colposcopy. Most of us take cervical smears regularly but how many of us can say we always take a good one? This commonly performed and simple procedure is often done very inadequately (probably due to faulty undergraduate training), so it is good to have a set of basic instructions on how to take a good smear—which type of spatula to use on which type of cervix, etc and how to take a smear after cervical surgery. Also useful is how to interpret the cytology report and guidelines on further action.

All the sexually transmitted diseases, their diagnosis, investigation and management are covered, as is the importance of contact tracing and patient confidentiality. The chapter headings are the “symptoms” with which patients present, rather than the disease, such as Perine Rash, Scrotal Pain, Dysuria in Young Men, and Genital Irritation. This makes it an excellent reference book in a general practice setting, and very quick and easy to use. The book concludes with a much needed, and often forgotten, section on genital problems in childhood.

Chris Sonnex has successfully conveyed the message in his book that genitourinary medicine clinics are no longer places dealing exclusively in STDS. Referral is now also recommended for a wide variety of non-STD genital problems, such as genital dermatoses, recurrent candidiasis, scrotal discomfort, etc, and happily the stigma once attached to these clinics is gradually disappearing.

This excellent little book is aimed at general practitioners, but the text is so clear and interesting that it would also be an invaluable reference for final year medical students and practice nurses.

ANTHEA EDGAR

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