

Book Reviews

Clinical Negligence and Complaints: A Clinician's Guide

M. Green, K. McConnochie

Royal Society of Medicine Press: London, UK, 2002, 114 pp; indexed
ISBN: 1-85315-504-7; Price £19.50

Everyone knows that doctors and lawyers speak different languages. Books written by lawyers for doctors are often impenetrable to their target readers, and vice versa. Happily, this book is not one of them. The increase in 'defections' from the medical profession to the legal has had several benefits, not the least of which has been an improvement in the number and accessibility of medico-legal texts such as this (one of the authors, now a barrister, had previously passed her MRCP examination).

Like it or not, the threat of litigation is increasingly a part of contemporary medical practice. Criminal proceedings are still mercifully uncommon, but civil actions in negligence are becoming ever more prevalent. Green and McConnochie highlight the problem in a revealing (if unsettling) first chapter. An extended second chapter details the basic theoretical legal concepts surrounding negligence. The remainder of the

book is of a more practical nature, dealing with the process of both litigious (i.e. referred to the courts) and non-litigious (i.e. hospital complaints procedures) handling of disputes between patients, hospitals and doctors. The inclusion of appendices detailing notable cases, the Civil Court Service pre-action protocol for clinical dispute resolution, and the Law Society protocol for obtaining medical records are of particular interest.

Readers are certainly not going to become experts in the field of clinical negligence, but the text is short, clear, relatively free from 'legalese', and reassuring enough to provide information and comfort to the doctor answering a complaint or defending a legal action from a disgruntled patient.

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Top Tips in Critical Care

G. R. Park, R. N. Sladen (eds)

Greenwich Medical Media: London, UK, 2001, 144 pp
ISBN: 1-84110-120-6; Price £12.50

This is not a book that initially struck me as praiseworthy. After all, a collection of 'top tips' owes more to *Women's Weekly* than to medical literature, being about as far from the concept of evidence-based medicine as one can get. Indeed, some of the tips are facile in the extreme, whilst others are at times incongruous, possibly dangerous or more complicated in their performance than the problem they have been developed to overcome. Readers are asked in the Preface to 'intelligently evaluate each tip before using them on patients'. However, this begs the question of how the junior intensive care unit (ICU) physician (for whom this book is of greatest benefit) is meant to discern sensible advice from whimsical anecdote.

Nevertheless, there are some interesting and valuable tips ('dos') and caveats ('don'ts') to be gleaned from this slim volume, including the reviewer's favourite: consider axillary artery cannulation in long-term patients, but make sure you use a catheter of sufficient length – completely impractical, of course, on most ICUs! However, Drs Park and Sladen have hit on a good idea. They freely admit that the book is not evidence based, but they seek to remind the reader that medicine is so much more than the application of scientific knowledge. Evidence-based medicine, with its emphasis on meta-analysis and huge patient numbers, ignores the individuality of patients in unique clinical situations. Park and

Sladen's 'top tips' are probably all amenable to statistical analysis, but the results would only confirm what they and their contributors have learnt through clinical experience. The book's real strength lies in providing ideas for the management of difficult patients beyond that found in more conventional textbooks.

The future accumulation of more 'top tips' will improve this book, but for the moment, Park and Sladen have presented an enjoyable addition to the coffee table literature of ICUs everywhere.

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ERRATA:

Hong JY, Lee IH. Suprascapular nerve block or a piroxicam patch for shoulder tip pain after day case laparoscopic surgery. *Eur J Anaesthesiol* 2003; 20: 234–238.

In Fig. 1a, b of this paper the symbols for controls and piroxicam patches were transposed. The authors regret that this error was not recognized at the proof stage.

Leykin Y, Rubulotta F. Prophylactic continuous intravenous ephedrine infusion for elective Caesarean section under spinal anaesthesia. *Eur J Anaesthesiol* 2003; 20: 257–258.

The editor and publishers regret that the sentence (on page 258, column 1, paragraph 2) commencing 'We use compound sodium lactate solution (500 mL) given as a preload over 10 min before the intrathecal injection of hyperbaric bupivacaine' should have read 'Loughrey and colleagues [1] used compound sodium lactate solution (500 mL) given as a preload over 10 min before the intrathecal injection of hyperbaric bupivacaine'.