

second covers common diseases in different systems, followed by a section on infectious diseases, including sexually transmitted diseases. The fourth and fifth sections describe the characteristics of different drugs and their possible use in various conditions. The final two sections are designed as a reference for the reader, and include an alphabetical list of drugs and a glossary.

Given the target audience, descriptions of diseases, treatments, and drugs are, of necessity, kept brief and elementary. The section dealing with patient management is practical and useful, especially for the health care worker who practises alone, and without supervision.

The real strength of this manual lies in the section describing different drugs—one can find essential information and guidance for usage in a clear and simple manner. Less satisfactory, however, is the section describing different diseases, both in terms of content and arrangement. For example, common conditions such as thyroid diseases, ischaemic heart disease, and pneumonia are conspicuous by their absence, whereas sleep disorders are given inappropriately lengthy coverage. Similarly, human immunodeficiency virus infection has become one of the most important infectious diseases in many underdeveloped countries but is not mentioned at all. Even more deplorable is the total lack of reference to bronchodilators in the treatment of asthma and chronic bronchitis. In fact, the incomplete information and especially the restricted choice of drugs is a source of irritation until one realises that only agents that Action Medeor can provide

are described. Elsewhere, well-known infectious diseases such as influenza, meningitis, dysentery, acute gastroenteritis, amoebiasis, cholera, hepatitis, tetanus, and candidiasis have all been covered under diseases of different systems. This scattered approach leads to some inconvenience in reading.

In my opinion, this manual, because of its rudimentary nature, is not recommended for medical practitioners in Hong Kong. It is also not suitable for our nursing and medical auxiliary staff, for whom better textbooks are available. Instead, its main audience should be doctors, nurses, and medical auxiliary personnel committed to providing essential medical care and public health services in less developed parts of the world. In this respect, local doctors and nurses participating in voluntary medical services in underprivileged areas (eg Médecins Sans Frontières) may find the book helpful.

To recap, this manual will be of greatest relevance to public health personnel working in areas where resources are scarce. The presentation is straightforward and focused, and the lucid language and style contribute to the book's readability. Moreover, despite some of the aforementioned shortcomings, the contents are, on the whole, accurate.

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The nation's health, sixth edition

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*Jones and Bartlett Publishers, 40 Tall Pine Drive, Sudbury, MA 01776, United States of America
US\$53.75, pp 573, ISBN 0 7637 1286 8*

This paperback is a collection of chapters on health care, health policies, and health care financing in the US, written by authors with diverse backgrounds in health care, politics, and health economics. It is divided into five parts, covering the health of the nation and determinants of health, health policy and the politics of health, the relationship between medicine and public health, health care financing and quality, and women's health and ageing. Each part is divided into different chapters, which are in turn subdivided into articles. Adequate references are provided.

The material is exclusively confined to the US and a detailed picture of the current state of health care in that country is painted. This notwithstanding, some of the principles described have general applications, such as the relationship between medicine and public health, and the determinants of health. The US-specific information may also be of use to readers in other countries wishing to compare different health care systems. The topics covered in this book should be of particular interest to readers in Hong Kong, as the government and health care providers here are faced with the issues of an ageing population, an increasing

chronic disease and disability burden, escalating health care costs (which will not be met solely by the government), and ever-increasing public expectations and demand. The book covers all of these areas, and gives the reader a good framework within which to tackle these issues in Hong Kong.

In examining the determinants of health, the chapters describe a good database of health indicators that is constantly being updated to reflect trends, and emphasise the importance of examining inequalities in these indicators within a single country. Socio-economic circumstances or methods of health care delivery may contribute to such inequalities, and it is important for any country to monitor these variations. The latest government health target—Healthy People 2010 Objective—is described, and there should be valuable examples here for Hong Kong.

The chapter on health policy and the politics of health describes in detail the dynamics between policy and politics—something which all health care workers should read! The reader might be forgiven for receiving the impression that politics is the main factor in deciding policy. The section on the interaction between medicine and public health strikes a more positive note, however, by showing how much has been accomplished through preventive efforts, and the power of collaboration between the two disciplines. The section on health care financing may not be of

great interest to readers outside the US, except for the chapters on how health care financing methods may affect quality of care, and how quality of care may be measured in any health care delivery system.

A separate section is devoted to women's health. This area has been highlighted in the US in recent years, showing that women (particularly blacks and ethnic minorities) have poorer health, are at a disadvantage in socio-economic terms, and suffer biases in terms of health care provision and physical abuse. Since women have a longer life expectancy than men, they also spend a longer period with chronic illnesses and disabilities. The major diseases affecting older women are heart disease, osteoporosis, Alzheimer's disease, and depression. Women are also prone to the consequences of having to take on the role of informal caregivers, since the general direction of governments is to shift chronic long-term care to the community.

Overall, this book should be of interest to health care workers involved in organising health care services, as well as to politicians who would like to address the issue of health care provision.

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Psychosocial oncology and palliative care in Hong Kong: the first decade

Ed: Fielding R, Chan CLW
Hong Kong University Press, 14/F Hing Wai Centre, 7 Tin Wan Praya Road, Hong Kong
HK\$160, pp 290, ISBN 962 209 503 8

“To cure sometimes, to care always” and “When we can no longer add days to life, add life to the days” are sayings at the heart of this book, and must linger in the ears of all health professionals who care for patients with cancer. In today's complex and high technology hospital-clinic environment, it is easy to forget that caring for the patients is as important as treating the cancer—and even more so when the disease is incurable.

For many decades, the curriculum of medical, nursing, and other health care sciences offered little (if any) introduction to this very important aspect of professional education. The novice doctor, nurse, or

social worker had to muster his or her wit coping with each situation, and learning all the way. On the one hand, we encourage the potentially cured patient with cancer to ‘get back on his or her feet’ and face the challenges of life. On the other, we help the incurable patient and their loved ones overcome their mental anguish, and add comfort, dignity, and love to the remaining days. It takes a lot of skill, knowledge, and experience. Some of us more or less succeed after many years. Others never acquire that skill.

Psychosocial oncology is now a recognised discipline in the broad sphere of oncology. Palliative care