X-ray diagnosis: a physician's approach

By: Sin Fai Lam KN, Rajasoorya C, Abisheganaden J, Chew W
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The cover picture of *X-Ray Diagnosis: A Physician's Approach* depicts a stethoscope overlying a jigsaw of a chest X-ray and correctly illustrates the concept of diagnostic radiology: fitting together the jigsaw pieces of information that can be deciphered from the X-ray images to try and reach a diagnosis. Some of the most essential pieces of information could be given on the X-ray request form. However, the form is often less informative than it could be, either because it is indecipherable, or because it is readable but written by a well-meaning, exhausted junior doctor without sufficient experience to know what important details to include. Although some senior doctors make the effort, there are those who strive to withhold information, presumably so they can hold X-rays upside down before a ward night-light and impress their befuddled juniors with their diagnostic skill!

For a radiologist, *X-Ray Diagnosis: A Physician's Approach* is a curious publication. The advice given to the clinician regarding the interpretation of X-rays is a disappointment. Firstly, the brief advice given is applicable to any branch of medicine and does not reveal any specific secrets of the trade for physicians. Secondly, the quaint language is reminiscent of textbooks of the 1940s. Thirdly, the inaccuracies are epitomised by calling barium a 'dye'. Fourthly, of the 103 images, more than 20% are not plain X-ray films but computed tomography scans, barium angiograms, and even one percutaneous transhepatic biliary drainage! In addition, it is intriguing that in Singapore, the physicians—and not radiologists—seem to diagnose special investigations. Perhaps this is why, of two intravenous urographs, the discussion of the first is wrong and the second has a seriously incomplete differential diagnosis. The remaining images, mostly chest radiographs, are reasonable in terms of the problems they illustrate; some, however, have lost quality in the reproduction—one expects better from the publishers. The variable quality leaves the reader unsure as to whether the abnormalities identified are the patient's or the printer's, and results in the obvious disappointment of learning which signs you are supposed to see only when reading the denouement. I have to admit that I enjoyed solving the problems posed but I would expect any trainee radiologist to be able to say a lot more than is found in the explanations given in the book. Despite the promising cover, this book seems to have been 'thrown together' and, with so much else to read, I cannot recommend it as an essential book—fun may be, but not essential.

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Essentials of human nutrition

Ed: Mann J, Truswell AS
Oxford University Press, 18/F Warwick House East, Taikoo Place, 979 King's Road, Quarry Bay, Hong Kong
HK$455.00, pp 637, ISBN 0 19 262756 2

It is unusual to find such a broad spectrum of information on nutrition in one volume, and *Essentials of Human Nutrition* fills an existing gap in this area. The target audience includes doctors, medical students, nurses, dietitians, and food scientists; different sections may be more relevant to different professions.

The introductory chapter outlines the contents of

the book, which consists of nine sections. Topics include macro- and micro-nutrients; nutrition-related disorders; food groups; food toxicity and safety; nutritional assessment; nutrition at different life stages including requirements for athletes; clinical and public health aspects of nutrition; nutritional immunology; and enteral and parenteral support. The reader is able to grasp the essentials of all these topics. While each field is not covered in great depth, the basic information is well presented and the reader is provided with a good list of references to explore topics of interest further.

The section on energy and macronutrients covers carbohydrates, lipids, protein, energy, and alcohol in a systematic manner. The diagrams and tables are clear. In the section about energy, tables of how metabolic energy can be measured and calculated are very helpful to the reader. The chapter on alcohol contains up-to-date information regarding recent epidemiological studies on alcohol intake and coronary heart disease. A very useful table lists the quantities and types of alcoholic beverages that contain 10 g of alcohol. The section on organic and inorganic essential nutrients includes a brief description of the history of the discovery of the vitamins, as well as tables listing the vitamin content of foods and the recommended daily vitamin intakes. These are useful reference data.

Included in the third section on nutrition-related disorders are overweight and obesity, protein-energy malnutrition, cardiovascular diseases, diet and cancer, diabetes mellitus, and eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia. In the chapter on the treatment of obesity, dexfenfluramine is described as drug therapy, although it has since been withdrawn from the market after the use of this group of drugs was associated with valvular heart damage. This chapter could be updated in future editions. The epidemiology of diet and coronary heart disease is summarised very well in the chapter on cardiovascular diseases. The Appendix contains an excellent table of guidelines for lipid-lowering diets. The chapters on food groups, food toxicity, and safety cover important topics that are not commonly discussed in textbooks of nutrition. The chapters also highlight the toxins—chemical or bacteriological—that may contaminate food.

The case studies are an interesting feature of this book. They describe population nutritional issues as a result of war in former Yugoslavia, the effort of the World Health Organization to eliminate iodine deficiency disorder, the effect of poverty on the nutritional status of populations, and the cultural influence on nutrition using Tonga as an example.

The section on enteral and parenteral nutritional support would have been more helpful if a list of recommended products were included. A description of the method of estimating nutrient requirements in the intensive care setting and what type and quantity to give in the form of case studies would also have been useful, as would have the mention of products for specific diseases such as renal, liver, or pulmonary disease.

In summary, this is a very readable reference source that covers all areas of human nutrition and will be useful to readers from a wide spectrum of health care disciplines.

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PCR, second edition

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The polymerase chain reaction (PCR) was invented in 1985 to amplify specific DNA sequences. Because of the sensitivity, specificity, speed, and simplicity of the reaction, PCR has been used in a variety of applications in the past 10 years; such applications include characterising the structure and expression of genes; identifying of disease-causing genes and pathogens; diagnosing inherited disease prenatally; and DNA fingerprinting in forensics, agriculture, and archaeology.