

## Ambulatory medicine: the primary care of families, third edition

By: Mengel MB, Schwiebert LP

McGraw-Hill Book Company, Suite 2310, One Hung To Road, Kwun Tong, Kowloon, Hong Kong  
US\$44.95, pp 770, ISBN 0 8385 0387 X

This book provides comprehensive coverage of those complaints commonly encountered at the offices of family physicians, and general practitioners will undoubtedly find it useful and practical. It also has an adequate section on chronic illness. There, however, seems to be insufficient emphasis given to preventive medicine, for example, no reference has been made to primary medical care or the role of family physicians in providing holistic care, continuity of care, and quality care. The value of health promotion and health education has also been overlooked in this book. Working in partnership with other members of the primary health care team, family physicians can play an important role in community care and the care of the chronically ill. They should be encouraged to take an active part in community health; the book is lacking in this aspect.

In today's society, many diseases occur as a result of changing lifestyles and behaviours. The social determinants of health—in particular, smoking, substance misuse, unbalanced diet, lack of exercise, and irresponsible sex—are fast becoming the major factors underlying disease and illness. The book does not appear to give sufficient emphasis in this area. A section on the elderly patient is included, although there is little discussion on the preventive aspects in the ageing population. In fact, the World Health Organization's

campaign on 'active living, active ageing' should be promoted.

Ambulatory care goes beyond the practice of ambulatory medicine by family physicians. Rather, it is a multi-disciplinary approach, involving other members of the primary care team such as domiciliary physiotherapists, domiciliary occupational therapists, and community nurses. Ambulatory care is not therefore only about diagnosing and treating patients' symptoms but also places great emphasis on the holistic care of patients and their families. It covers four major areas—health promotion, disease prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation—all of whose activities are largely outside the hospital setting. This book fails to give due emphasis to all the important aspects of ambulatory care and the practice of ambulatory medicine in the primary care of families.

To summarise, this book gives good coverage of the clinical aspects of family medicine practice, but little mention is made of health promotion, disease prevention, and primary medical care, which are of equal importance in family medicine practice.

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## Medeor manual

By: Bircher J

Medpharm GmbH Scientific Publishers, Birkenwaldstrasse 44, D-70191 Stuttgart, Germany  
DM19.80, pp 136, ISBN 3 8876 3074 2

This manual is published under the auspices of the German Medical Welfare Organisation, Action Medeor. The author, Dr Johannes Bircher, has extensive experience of patient management and the inter-relationships between social, environmental, and other factors in the tropics. As stated in the preface, the manual is intended to assist public health providers (eg physicians, nurses, physicians' assistants, and other

auxiliary staff with limited medical knowledge) who have to work far away from major medical centres, under conditions that are less than ideal, and with a narrow range of drugs to choose from.

The book is divided into seven sections. The first gives a short description of common symptoms and general principles of diagnosis and treatment, and the

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

*By: Philip RL, Carroll LE*

*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