

Australian medicines handbook, third edition

Eds: S Rossi, A Vitry, E Hurley, et al

The Australian Medicines Handbook, PO Box 240, Rundle Mall, Adelaide 5000, Australia

AUS\$130.50 (AUS\$175.50 for book and CD-ROM; AUS\$130.50 for CD-ROM only), pp 265, ISBN 0 9578521 1 8

One of the most frequent activities of doctors is to prescribe, and the errors from prescribing are three-fold: to prescribe when it is unnecessary, to prescribe wrongly, and not to prescribe when it is helpful. Therefore, it is important for all of us to correctly prescribe, and few of us can remember all the details. Indeed it is both futile and dangerous to try, except for those items that are regularly prescribed. A readily available reminder system is therefore required. Many of us rely on commercially produced drug compendia, the only advantage of which is cheapness, but these can be misleading, especially when comparative information about the value of various treatment alternatives is needed. Pharmacopoeias, even the electronic version provided in the Hospital Authority record system, list what is available, but give little guidance on prescribing.

For many years, the *British national formulary* (BNF) has been the standard drug reference, but now a worthy competitor is available. The *Australian medicines handbook* is similar in size, and is easier to use. The layout, with headings and note form allow quick scanning to find the necessary information. Particularly useful features include the introductory segments that describe a general approach to treating each disease or group of diseases. These give

comparative information about the relative value of different drugs, and the editors are not afraid to say when a drug is not indicated or is inappropriate. The author group overlaps with those who produced the well-known *Therapeutic guidelines*, including both specialists and general practitioners in every subgroup, so it is relevant to both frontline and in-patient care, and the same critical, evidence-based approach is used. A particular feature is the listing of side-effects as common, infrequent, and rare. This gives a better indication than the unsystematic but all-inclusive listing in many drug books. Also useful are the practice points for special features or necessary precautions.

On the down side, the book only includes drugs that are used in Australia, and this is a limited selection, so some drugs used in Hong Kong are missing. However, the missing drugs are mainly copies of other drugs, so one would seldom miss out from only using the drugs listed in this book. It is slightly larger than the BNF and more than a 'pocketbook' for a white coat, but is easy to keep on a desk.

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I. Managing older patients with urinary retention in the Continence Clinic

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|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| A | 1. True | 2. False | 3. False | 4. False | 5. True |
| B | 1. True | 2. True | 3. False | 4. True | 5. False |
| C | 1. False | 2. True | 3. False | 4. True | 5. False |

HKMJ 2002;9:31-7

II. Are periodontal diseases risk factors for certain systemic disorders—what matters to medical practitioners?

- | | | | | | |
|---|----------|---------|----------|----------|---------|
| A | 1. True | 2. True | 3. False | 4. True | 5. True |
| B | 1. False | 2. True | 3. False | 4. False | 5. True |
| C | 1. True | 2. True | 3. False | 4. True | 5. True |
| D | 1. False | 2. True | 3. True | 4. True | 5. True |