

Handbook of women's health: an evidence-based approach

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This is a very useful compilation of texts by many authors. It is primarily aimed at doctors specialising in primary care, but it would also be useful for those working in a hospital setting, particularly in the areas of adolescent medicine, obstetrics and gynaecology, psychiatry, internal and geriatric medicine. As the title suggests, this handbook will provide the medical practitioner with guidelines for prevention as well as treatment for a comprehensive range of problems encountered by women in all stages of life, from adolescence to senescence. The layout is very clear, with summaries of key points, bulleted lists, algorithms, normal laboratory values, and highlighted key messages throughout the text. For those readers who would like to trace the book's original sources, the list of references is adequate without being overwhelming. This publication draws heavily on the recommendations of the United States Preventive Services Guidelines, and there may be some controversies on the applicability of these guidelines to the Hong Kong Chinese population. For example, the recommendation of mammography to women aged 50 years and over may not be applicable to the Hong Kong population, which has different disease patterns and health service delivery systems. Nevertheless, it is an extremely comprehensive text, covering physical, psychosocial, and preventive aspects of women's health.

There are nine main sections of the book. The first chapter describes the issues relating to women's health, pointing out gender differences in research agenda, societal differences, and physical and medical differences, which are often not considered. For example, women have poorer outcomes for angioplasty because their arteries are smaller. This chapter forms the rationale for a separate text devoted to women's health. Chapters 2 to 4 describe the preventive care of adolescents, adults and older adults, and contain excellent assessment scales for the latter. Occasionally, some statements appear oversimplified. For example, under 'School issues', it is stated that the question 'How are you doing in school?' can lead to discussions about future plans,

the lack of which may indicate depression. Chapters 5 to 7 cover lifestyle (smoking, diet, and exercise). The section on exercise is particularly good, incorporating detailed instructions that enable exercise prescription. In general, doctors do not acquire this knowledge in the undergraduate curriculum, and this section allows concrete instructions to be given to patients.

Chapter 8 covers the psychosocial aspects of all ages, and is an excellent summary for general practitioners and any practising doctors. Chapters 9 to 13 cover sexuality: contraception, infertility and adoption, sexual dysfunction, lesbianism, and medical care and pregnancy. Chapters 14 to 21 cover genitourinary medicine, and topics include menstrual disorders, sexually transmitted diseases, and incontinence. Whenever relevant, details of drugs and dosages are provided. Chapters 22 to 23 are devoted to breast diseases and screening, with algorithms and a summary of primary prevention trials for cancer. Psychological problems are comprehensively covered in chapters 24 to 28, including rape and consequences of sexual assault, addiction, and eating disorders. The final chapters, 29 to 33, cover the major medical diseases, such as coronary heart disease, diabetes, thyroid diseases, hypertension, stroke, osteoporosis, osteoarthritis, and rheumatoid arthritis. The tables summarising current drugs and dosages are excellent, and there is suitable emphasis on lifestyle modification.

Overall, this is a very useful, practical text for doctors, particularly for those working in a primary care setting.

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