

## Book Review

# Community Pharmacy: Symptoms, Diagnosis and Treatment

Paul Rutter (Ed.), ISBN 0 4430 7362 7, 2004, Churchill Livingstone, London.

When Edwards and Stillman first set out to publish their “Minor illness or major disease” articles in the *Pharmaceutical Journal* in the early 1980s, pharmacists were extremely cautious about trespassing on the general practitioner’s territory. Giving advice about symptoms and illness had always been part of the pharmacist’s job, but to say they “diagnosed” made them sound too much like doctors. So instead, pharmacy writers and editors coined the euphemism “responding to symptoms”, and it became embedded in pharmacy culture.

This new textbook, edited by Paul Rutter from the School of Pharmacy and Biomedical Sciences at Portsmouth University, UK, illustrates just how far pharmacy practice has come in 20 years. This bright and well designed addition to the pharmacist’s library on the management of common conditions not only has the “D word” right there in the title, but it talks about history-taking too. Every chapter has a section on differential diagnosis, and some describe physical examinations that pharmacists could carry out in the pharmacy.

The publishers say the book provides a comprehensive, clearly structured and colourfully illustrated guide to the differential diagnosis of symptoms commonly seen by community pharmacists. Intended for practising pharmacists and undergraduates, the aim is to provide a more in depth view of minor conditions than existing texts, with the evidence to back up OTC recommendations. Each chapter has been reviewed by a GP or another expert in the area.

Organisation is by body system, although the chapter order is different from that in the BNF. An introductory chapter discusses approaches to clinical decision-making, and the key steps involved in the process of forming a diagnosis. It takes a usefully critical look at the limitations of acronyms such as

WWHAM and ENCORE, pointing out that all fail to take social or lifestyle factors into account, or prompt questions about family history. A final chapter on “specific product requests” covers more idiosyncratic areas such as—travel sickness, sunscreens, malaria prophylaxis, emergency contraception and nicotine replacement therapy.

Each chapter starts with some anatomy, to orient the reader and a section on history-taking. Sections on specific conditions falling within the broad chapter heading then follow. Each condition has a table summarising key questions to ask, and their relevance plus information on conditions to eliminate. “Trigger points” panels flag up when to refer. Many conditions also have what the book calls a differential diagnosis primer—actually a flow chart.

Once a diagnosis has been made, the reader can consider the evidence for OTC treatment options, and read about practical tips on selecting and using products. Brand names are mentioned but the focus is on generic active ingredients.

The references cited in the “further reading” section at the end of each chapter are relevant and mostly accessible via the web, although this will probably be easier for undergraduates than for pharmacists in community practice. Chapters give useful website links, and there is a useful list of links to relevant e-journals and information sites inside the front cover.

Each chapter ends with a set of MCQs are designed to mimic the style used in the pre-registration exam. There are also two case studies drawn from real practice, with model answers.

Does this book live up to its claims? It certainly looks good; the layout is clean and bright, and the illustrations are excellent (the subconjunctival bleed photo is almost art work). But the strongest point of

this book is its structure; previous texts never quite got this quite right. The reader may be surprised to find nausea and vomiting in the CNS chapter, but it makes sense.

The chapter on “specific product requests” feels slightly contrived as customers often ask for specific products mentioned in other chapters too, but it allows the author to cover travel health and smoking cessation, which do not fit into the main structure. This reader’s only criticism comes over the section on EHC, which is brief and sits oddly with the rest (the book contains nothing about other methods of contraception). The advice on what to do if client does not fit the protocol is not terribly helpful, as contact numbers relate to Portsmouth area.

I would have liked to see more references in the text in the evidence-based sections, but this is a minor quibble. I would certainly recommend this book to pre-registration pharmacists as the MCQs at

the end of each chapter are a really useful resource. For undergraduates, the price is likely to make it a book for the library rather than one to buy.

One final thought: as previous texts have done, this book includes a chapter on “women’s health”. If pharmacists are to deliver high quality patient care should we not think about men’s health as well? Men take more risks with their health, and are much less likely to consult a GP or dentist, delaying a visit until later in the course of an illness, than women do. Yet spending on screening services for men is far less than that for women, and “men’s health” is still far from a high profile issue. It would be nice if the next edition of this useful new pharmacy text book could help to put this right.

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