BOOK REVIEWS

1987 Year Book of Emergency Medicine

Edited by DAVID WAGNER

Year Book Medical Publishers, Chicago. 1987. 297pp. £37.50.

Attempting to collate and review the best of the annual output of world literature in emergency medicine is an unenviable task. Dr David Wagner and his associate editors from the Medical College of Pennsylvania have met that challenge admirably to produce the *1987 Year Book*.

There are 292 articles representing some 82 Journals published worldwide. Inevitably, there is a North American bias in the selection, reflecting not only the quantity and quality of emergency medicine literature generated in the United States, but also, perhaps, their more aggressive approach to research and publication, as well as the availability of funds and facilities. Although there are nine articles from the United Kingdom, it is unfortunate that none of these come from an accident and emergency department. Of course, any literature review is fated to be out of date by the time of publication. This *1987 Year Book* is no exception, being first produced in April 1987, and including papers published between March 1985 and May 1986. Criticism of the delay in such exercises is valid but surely inappropriate, and one should applaud the entire year book concept.

The abstracts are individually presented in short sections covering, for example, vascular access, abdominal injuries, cardiac emergencies, dysrhythmias and so forth. This works well although there are some apparently ectopic articles. The use of a lighted stylet for orotracheal intubation appears in two different articles under the sections dealing both with prehospital care and emergency procedures, separated by some 28 pages. A similar inconsistency occurs with a paper discussing external cardiac pacing isolated in the prehospital care chapter from other team-mates found under cardiopulmonary emergencies. This is compensated for, however, by a very good double index system, listing both subjects and all authors.

Each selection consists of the author's summary followed by editorial comments from one of eleven contributing editors. The overall standard of comment is very good with some excellent authoritative remarks, especially on the articles discussing cerebral protection and asthma. At the other extreme, one editor clearly believes in the virtues of brevity and merely summarizes the summary, but this was a singular exception. The presentation of what could, so easily, have become a dense and tedious collection is attractive, easy to read and lends itself to repeated quick dips. There are frequent illustrations, line diagrams and the occasional photograph. Again, these represent a spectrum of quality: some are very good indeed whilst others are, frankly, non-contributory to the text.

Interestingly, a handful of papers attract some quite frank criticism, particularly those which really add nothing to our present knowledge. One wonders, therefore, why

they merited inclusion (the description of ring removal being an example). Some editorial comments would be unlikely to find their way into a review produced on this side of the Atlantic: the update on red cell substitutes is described as 'close, but no cigar', and intensive care scoring systems being likened to 'cookbook medicine'!

Overall, the standard of papers is high, although there is no indication as to the criteria used for choosing the articles. Within the chapters, there are groups of articles around a few common themes, for example, asthma, external cardiac pacing and cervical spine injuries, but most other topics have one or two selections only, thus wisely avoiding the tendency towards becoming a textbook. This approach allows the editors to produce a real pot-pourri reflecting the great diversity of the specialty. This ranges from the very frontiers of laboratory research, for example, cerebral protection, through topic reviews and clinical trials to the borders of esoterica, including the use of hypnosis in the emergency room, the hazards of plastic diapers and the use of magnetic resonance imaging in the diagnosis of appendicitis.

At £37.50 for the 297 pages of text this will not fall within every individual's budget. However, I can strongly recommend it for any back-pay residuals and the *1987 Year Book* certainly should, with its predecessors, find a place in every departmental library, especially those involved in accident and emergency career training. Any chance of steering departmental or hospital library funds in this direction should be exploited. Although the vast majority of papers are from the United States, the paradox is that this book should have more appeal to readers on this side of the pond, particularly those who do not normally have access to the American journals. Another aspect which will appeal to the UK readership is the virtual absence of papers of relevance only to indigenous Americans. Although the final section of emergency medical services systems includes papers on malpractice and free standing emergency centres (likened to fast food medicine), these offer an interesting insight into American practice. Even the article on rattlesnake envenomation could come in useful one day!

In summary, the authors are to be congratulated on producing an excellent and stimulating collection. For the first time since *The Bourne Supremacy* (Ludlum R.), it was a book I honestly could not put down!

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Wound Care

By WILLIAM M. COCKE JR, RALEIGH R. WHITE IV, DENNIS J. LYNCH & CHARLES N. VERHEYDEN

Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh. 1986. 113pp. £21.00.

The most common error in wound management is an over-emphasis on primary wound closure. Starting with this thesis, the authors attempt to redress the balance and nail