Early antibiotic treatment decreases the risk of dying from meningococcal disease. Strategies to improve this are thus worthwhile. However, in a single centre these cannot be expected to show a decrease in mortality.

Dr A de A Nishioka’s suggestion that “first manifestation to first examination time” might be a useful prognostic indicator is correct. However, children with severe meningococcal disease become unwell rapidly and present to hospital sooner. In a previously reported cohort of children with meningococcal disease, median “first manifestation to first examination time” was significantly shorter in those who died compared with survivors (12 hours versus 17 hours; p=0.012). The usefulness of this finding is thus confounded by disease severity. However, early recognition of meningococcal disease by parents can lead to better outcomes.

I agree that parents require accurate and appropriate information about meningococcal disease, but improvements are also required in the early recognition and treatment of children with this potentially life-threatening disease.
Unfortunately, many of the entries in the book are redundant. When did you last treat a case of ethchlorvynol poisoning, or someone bitten by a Gila monster? What is needed in the emergency department is rapidly accessible, up to date management of the effects of poisoning by a particular compound. This is where computer based information such as Toxbase really comes into its own. Much of the information in this book is interesting but instantly forgettable, especially where so many toxins are presented.

Written by the director of toxicology in the department of emergency medicine in Ayer, Massachusetts, the book tries to appeal to toxicologists and emergency physicians alike. The blurb on the back cover promises to help the reader: “Assess the problem, identify the toxin, select the appropriate treatment, improve outcomes, and review for subspecialty certification in toxicology”. I was left feeling that it only succeeds in the last of these worthy aims.

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