

JOURNAL OF CLINICAL AND DIAGNOSTIC RESEARCH

How to cite this article:

SHANKAR P R.CLINICAL PHARMACOLOGY.Journal of Clinical and Diagnostic Research [serial online] 2009 December [cited: 2009 December 7]; 3:1977-1978.

Available from

http://www.jcdr.net/back_issues.asp?issn=0973-709x&year=2009&month=December &volume=3&issue=6&page=1977-1978&id=514

Book Review

Clinical Pharmacology

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Many years ago when I was a medical student my Pharmacology Professor used to strongly recommend Laurence and Bennett as essential reading. 'Laurence' he used to say 'is a wonderful book'. After his strong recommendation I flipped through Laurence intrigued by this book which managed to arouse such strong passions in our Professor and was hooked right from day one! I enjoyed the emphasis on using drugs in patients, the short stories and anecdotes and the superb usage of English along with the subtle humor. Professor Laurence has retired from the editorship of the book from the ninth edition. I especially liked his farewell message emphasizing people retire before they become a source of embarrassment to their colleagues. In 1957 when Laurence was a senior lecturer at London he complained to his professor about there not being a book on Clinical Pharmacology which he could recommend to his students. He was encouraged to write one and the first edition was released in 1960.

A new edition (tenth) was recently published in 2008. The new edition continues with many of the features which made its predecessors so popular among students and teachers. The new edition following recent trends uses color liberally. There are eight sections in the book and each section uses a separate color making it easy to find

sections. The first section 'General' has the landmark chapters on 'Topics in drug therapy', 'Discovery and development of drugs' and 'Evaluation of drugs in humans'. As a medical student, postgraduate student and later as a Clinical Pharmacologist and Medical Educator I enjoyed reading these thought provoking chapters.

The change is mainly in use of multicolored diagrams and greater readability of the text. The guide to further reading section contains links to resources on the World Wide Web in certain chapters. Many new diagrams have been added and certain others redrawn. At 694 pages the book is more than 100 pages thinner than the ninth edition. This is quite rare in the modern era of expanding book sizes!

A concern I have is that in certain cases conciseness may lead to omission of potentially important information. One example I noted was the lack of reference to zinc in the management of diarrhea. The strength of the book is its manageable size and providing a system of understanding to the medical student and the doctor who wants to rationally use drugs in his patient. The book is linked to 'Student Consult' (an online resource) which provides links to accessing the complete book online, multiple choice questions, integration to bonus contents from other Student Consult titles among others.

Many new medicines have been mentioned in the tenth edition. I would have liked more information about common tropical diseases like leprosy and tuberculosis. The edition follows the tradition of preceding ones in

providing an overview of Clinical Pharmacology and Therapeutics to the non-specialist reader. The book does not concentrate much on the molecular mechanisms of drug action, personalized drug therapy and other emerging areas. We are living in an era of rapid increase in the number of drugs and therapies. Many of these have been said to be 'me too' drugs clamoring for a share of the vast drug market and only a few represent genuine therapeutic advances. A careful and detailed reading of this book will help readers differentiate genuine therapeutic advances from molecular gimmickry aimed at increasing or retaining market share.

The book will help readers in developing countries use medicines rationally. The book

helps in creating a strong system of knowledge during the undergraduate student days and in helping practitioners learn about important advances in therapeutics. The tenth edition is the most 'colorful' one yet. The book will be useful reading for all interested in learning or revising their knowledge about drug therapy and help in promoting rational use of medicines. Environmentalists will be happy to note that the book has been printed on paper manufactured from sustainable forests.

About The Book

Bennett PN, Brown MJ (eds.) Clinical Pharmacology. Tenth edition. Churchill Livingstone: 2008.