Book Reviews


Dr Scalea is a veteran in trauma surgery, who guides you through intricate details as a local person would through labyrinthine by lanes of an old city.

Humankind has always been facing traumatic injuries whether it be falls, burns, road accidents or assaults. Trauma is swift in onset but slow in recovery. Both the mechanisms and principles of trauma management have seen radical changes over time. The history of trauma management has essentially been the history of military or wartime injuries until Dr R. Adams Cowley conceptualized the stepwise management of traumatic injuries. After implementing these principles in the army, Dr Cowley refined them and applied them to civilian trauma settings. The importance of golden hour was soon realized and many ‘surgical dictums’ of management of trauma were challenged. Unfortunately, these evolving concepts and techniques have not been given their due place in the current textbooks on general surgery. Medical students worldwide are stuck with those orthodox ‘surgical dictums’ for trauma as their guide. This manual will be extremely helpful in bridging these gaps. It provides the readers with the essential, recent and accurate concepts and approaches to trauma management.

The most appreciable feature of this book is its clarity and simplicity of language. Clean line diagrams create an anatomical blueprint in the mind of the reader, which is supplemented by a lucid explanation; and beautiful original photographs forge a strong image of the operative technique.

Another impressive quality of this manual is that it is concise. Not a single word in this book is superfluous. All the chapters are succinct and to the point. This not only makes the manual handy and easy to carry in the apron pocket but also makes it easy to flip through just before a surgery.

Each chapter in this manual is written by a master of the subject, and the quality of coverage is consistent throughout the book. Each chapter follows the same format—introduction, history, examination, operative technique, outcomes and complications. This provides a nice rhythm to the book and makes it reader-friendly. Information in each chapter is complete and is easy to apply on the operating table.

The use of minimally invasive techniques in trauma is fast gaining acceptance. It would have been worth including a chapter on laparoscopy in trauma and procedures such as diagnostic laparoscopy.

This delightful little book costs around ₹9000 in India, which makes it out of reach for most medical students. The publishers should consider producing a more economical edition for the Indian subcontinent.

Would we recommend this book to our surgeon friends and students? The only word we can think of is ‘STRONGLY’.

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Statistics is an integral part of medical research and understanding statistical analysis is essential for anyone who practises evidence-based medicine. This is true not only for those who conduct research, but also for those who read scientific papers and try to assess the relevance of new information to their medical practice. Hence, it is not surprising that several books are published every year on the use of statistical methods in healthcare research. This book is a new addition to this category.

The authors state that the book is aimed at students in medicine, epidemiology and public health, and practitioners of evidence-based medicine. To that end, it covers, in 17 chapters, a wide range of topics, including study designs, descriptive statistics for both categorical and quantitative variables, hypothesis testing in relation to both these types of variables, simple and multiple linear regression, binary logistic regression, Poisson regression, survival analysis and assessment of diagnostic tests. That includes nearly everything in statistics that an average health science professional needs to know. Of course, it does not cover complex statistical procedures, which are beyond its scope.

However, this book has a different take on the subject. It seeks to integrate the imparting of knowledge about statistical concepts with the teaching of how to use a common statistical software, IBM® SPSS®. Throughout the book, the authors explain the steps required in SPSS to perform the particular statistical analysis being discussed, using liberally various screenshots from the software, including drop-down menus, dialog boxes and outputs. They explain each statistical procedure step-wise, indicating how various options are used to put data into the software, and how the output for each procedure is interpreted. Importantly, these SPSS
exercises use data from real-life medical studies, available online in the public domain (and on the book publisher’s website); thus, allowing readers to practise the SPSS procedure as they read through each chapter. This also ensures that the examples, being from the health science field, are of interest to the intended readers.

Each chapter also has several quiz questions, interspersed through the text after every section, for the readers to test their understanding of the material already covered, before they move to the next section. Each chapter has several ‘end-of-chapter’ exercises for the readers to practise the software skills acquired.

However, I faced some problems in using this book. The preface indicates that ‘… readers should be able to respond without having access to SPSS’. However, I strongly believe that if I had not been familiar with this software or had no access to it, it would have been very difficult for me to understand the contents of this book. Further, the authors fail to strike the right balance between their two objectives, i.e. explaining statistical concepts and making a ‘how to do’ manual. They have tended to veer more towards the latter at the cost of the former. Thus, statistical concepts take a back seat. For instance, in the section on study designs, several important concepts such as masking (blinding) of observer, intention-to-treat versus per-protocol analysis get only a passing mention. Another example is the chapter on comparing means of related samples—here it is not mentioned that the paired \( t \)-test is also applicable for matched case–control studies.

The effort at integration with SPSS has also posed other problems. First, the attempt to provide screenshots of various consecutive steps in SPSS software frequently necessitates more figures than can be easily arranged in the pages of the book. Thus, several screenshots are located far away from their reference in the text, making the reader frequently turn pages back and forth. Some large SPSS output tables (e.g. Tables 10.18, 10.24, 11.2, 11.5), which are printed within the page width, have very small font sizes and are almost unreadable (at least for elderly readers). These tables could have been printed either landscape, or only relevant parts of the tables could have been shown. Some SPSS screenshots are fuzzy.

There is also lack of clarity about who may use the book and how. The preface states: ‘The data sets themselves can be found at http://…, as can the answers to the in-chapter questions and end-of-chapter exercises. On the assumption that course instructors might wish to assign the end-of-chapter exercises as homework, their solutions are available only to instructors on the Springer page for the book (http://...).’ Having the answers to in-chapter questions available on the web defeats the purpose of any intended feedback for those reading the hardcover version. A reader who does make the effort too is in for a shock. On visiting the specified webpage, I found that access to solutions for both ‘in-chapter’ as well as ‘end-of-chapter’ questions required ‘instructor password’. Hence, for a ‘stand-alone’ reader (one without an instructor, but who nevertheless buys the book), neither type of questions would be of much use since their solutions are not accessible. The confusion does not end there. The instruction on page 151 reads: ‘A script has been written to construct CIs (confidence intervals) for a single population proportion. … Your instructor will tell you where to find it.’ This left me, who did not have an instructor, flummoxed. There was no indication that the script was available online—I realized this only when I downloaded a zip file with the practice datasets, and found this and other scripts within the zipped file.

How does this book perform at teaching SPSS procedures? In most chapters, the procedures describe the commonly used options, while ignoring the options that are used less often. Thus, the book ends up inferior to SPSS manuals—available aplenty online—in completeness.

Overall, the book is a useful addition to many similar tomes on the subject. It should be of value primarily to those who are already initiated to various statistical techniques and are looking for a resource to help them in using the SPSS software. It is not for those trying to understand the basic principles of statistics or those well versed in it.

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