Book Reviews


Hair disorders, especially alopecias, are an evolving field in dermatology and have a major psychosocial impact on patients’ lives. Advances in the study of the science, structure and molecular biology of hair follicles are occurring rapidly and so is the development of newer treatment modalities for targeting hair follicles. The editors of this book aim to offer a concise and practical approach to the evaluation and management of these disorders.

The book begins with a brief chapter on the biology of normal and ageing hair, but the focus is mainly on ageing hair. A diagrammatic representation of various concepts and theories would have given a better visual impact. The following chapters on evaluation of hair loss and trichoscopy are well-written and beautifully illustrated, and provide a step-by-step approach to clinical examination and trichoscopy. Numerous practical points discussed will help the physician in performing a comprehensive evaluation of a patient presenting with alopecia. These chapters will be particularly important for postgraduate students and will serve as a practical refresher on the evaluation of alopecias for veteran practitioners.

There is a discussion of individual hair disorders beginning with a chapter on male pattern baldness, which gives a good overview of male androgenetic alopecia with practical tips on its management. The chapter on female pattern hair loss describes many new experimental therapies. There is also a brief description of alopecias in children. Though many of the inherited disorders have been delineated, the description could have been enhanced with better illustrations. The sections on alopecia areata and primary scarring alopecias are discussed in sufficient detail and the chapter on genetics of alopecias elaborates the genetics of both syndromic alopecias and more common conditions such as androgenetic alopecia. The two chapters on hair care and dyeing and hair greying provide valuable information, which will enable the dermatologist to address the concerns of patients on these issues. In the end, among other surgical advances, the new technique of partial longitudinal follicle unit transplantation (which allows preservation of donor follicles) is beautifully described by the pioneers of this technique.

Overall, this book is a compact treatise that gives useful practical tips while briefly describing advances in the pathogenesis of common hair disorders. As is clear from the title, it aims to offer practical tips on the management and evaluation—an aim that it almost achieves. Practising dermatologists and residents in dermatology are most likely to benefit from this book while approaching patients with hair disorders. Though most chapters are well-illustrated, a few more illustrations could have made the text more readable and informative.

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The editors and publishers of this book must be congratulated for putting together a wealth of information, latest scientific evidence and current thinking on the epidemic of tobacco use, which kills almost 6 million people each year globally. The chapters have been written by renowned researchers with expertise in their respective fields. This makes it an essential buy for libraries, academicians, clinicians and public health specialists.

The book comprehensively covers all aspects of the tobacco epidemic from global strategies for tobacco control by the WHO, to the neurobiological mechanisms of tobacco addiction and pharmacological treatment options for treating tobacco dependence. It has dedicated chapters on contemporary ‘hot topics’, such as smokeless tobacco as well as e-cigarettes, which have been widely debated in the medical and public health fraternity.

WHO estimates that 80% of morbidity and mortality due to tobacco use in the coming years is going to be borne by low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). It is also well-known that low socioeconomic status is associated with both higher prevalence of tobacco use as well as lower quit rates. Thus, a separate chapter on special aspects of ‘the tobacco epidemic in LMICs’ including high prevalence of smokeless tobacco use in the Indian subcontinent seems imperative, but is currently missing.

In terms of treating tobacco dependence, the book mentions that the combination of behavioural interventions (such as counselling) with pharmacotherapy is more effective than either alone. However, it does not provide any theoretical, practical or clinical information on behavioural interventions. Thus, a chapter on ‘behavioural interventions for tobacco cessation’ including the latest theories of behaviour change and motivation in the context of tobacco cessation would be desirable. The book would also benefit from adding a flowchart on ‘clinical approach’ to a

Cancers of the gastrointestinal system are among the most dominant in the western and developed world and are increasing alarmingly even in developing countries. The digestive tract has always been challenging for its well-organized and yet complex anatomy. However, its interplay with the central nervous system and the cross-talk between various digestive organs continue to fascinate physiologists, endocrinologists, researchers and more recently molecular biologists and even surgeons.

Despite advances in the understanding and treatment of gastrointestinal cancers, the only curative treatment has been radical surgery. In this era of information explosion and confusion, this book by Kim and Garcia-Aguilar is a breath of fresh air. The authors have met their primary aim of publishing a book that will update technical aspects to general surgeons with a special interest in gastrointestinal cancer surgery and also to senior residents of this specialty. The highlight of the book is the structure of each chapter, which gives in detail the key operative steps and historical background. Each chapter addresses important aspects of patient preparation and positioning in the operating room and key anatomical aspects, which are often crucial for safe and comfortable surgery with good outcomes. There are sections dedicated to complex intraoperative situations and prevention and management of complications. Appropriate diagrams, figures and intraoperative photographs make for easier understanding of the viewpoint of authors, many of whom are authorities in their field. Newer, cutting-edge developments such as advanced laparoscopic surgery and robotic surgery are also reasonably covered.

Since pancreatic surgery is covered in this eminently readable book, the reader may wonder why gallbladder cancer surgery (uncommon in the USA) and liver surgery are not covered.

In summary, this book will be an asset to every gastrointestinal cancer surgeon and even general surgeons doing occasional cancer surgery.

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If Dr Sacks were a patient, endurance would ordinarily be required of you when recording his medical history. Fortunately, gifted raconteur that he is, you would end up listening wide-eyed and, like Oliver Twist, asking for more.

As though he anticipated such a need, Dr Sacks has written his autobiography in which he has scrupulously documented his injuries, illnesses and operations, including those for total replacement of his left knee and for sciatica (‘an inadequate term’) in his seventies. For his most recent illness, however, you need to visit the website of the New York Times and read his account in the issue dated 19 February 2015. I strongly commend this essay to you for it embodies all the qualities for which Dr Sacks is justly famed. I will not rob you of the great experience of reading his essay by saying any more on it.

On the move is, of course, much, much more than just an account of Dr Sacks’ personal ailments. It takes you on a roller-coaster ride through his happy childhood at home amidst loving and admirable parents; tribulations of being sent away at the age of six at the beginning of World War II to a country boarding school for safety; medical education in Oxford (where among the life-long friends he made, was Dr Jonathan Miller) and his subsequent career in America. I advisedly use the term roller-coaster for there are many ups and downs in his narrative, flashbacks and fast-forwards making it often necessary to turn pages back and forth.

On page 1 itself he introduces us to his love of motorbikes. As we read the book, we share his thrills as he travels thousands of kilometres on a variety of these vehicles. We also learn of the daredevilry that caused accidents and the remarkable near-
catastrophe described on page 5. His teacher was astute when he noted: ‘Sacks will go far, if he does not go too far.’

On page 6 he gives us a glimpse into one of the means that he has used to produce his enviable and huge output of books, papers and essays. Footnote 1 on this page refers to the ‘notebook I kept at the time’. Later we learn of how this urge to write led to his being called Inky as a boy and how by the time he wrote this book he had nearly a thousand of the notebooks in which he recorded observations, thoughts and quotations from the works of others. ‘I always keep a notebook by my bedside for dreams as well as nighttime thoughts and I try to have one by the swimming pool (he uses every opportunity he gets to be in water) or the lakeside or the seashore, swimming is very productive of thoughts which I must write…’ Photographs in the book show him writing on the roof of his car, soon after he has emerged from the railway station in Amsterdam and at Machu Picchu. Another secret: ‘Over a lifetime, I have written millions of words, but the act of writing seems as fresh, and as much fun, as when I started it nearly seventy years ago.’

He loves receiving and sending letters. We are fortunate that he has preserved all the letters he has received and copies of those he sent out. (‘…I find these old letters a great treasure, a corrective to the deceipts of memory and fantasy…’) These will form a rich treasure trove for all those who wish to learn more about him.

I find his candour refreshing and disarming. There is nothing he holds back from his readers. His experiences with alcohol, hallucinogenic drugs and homosexuality form significant components in this narrative. On page 9 we are told of his conversation with his father (a respected family physician who remained a beloved physician to his patients to the day he died) about his preference for boys and the repercussion when—against his wish—his mother was told about it. As you would expect, Dr Sacks deals with his sexual experiences with men discreetly but frankly. The episode where he disclosed his sexual abstinence for 35 years and the response to it are hilarious. You cannot but empathize with Dr Sacks’ description of his meeting, when he turned 75, with Billy Hayes and the feelings that inspired him to write…’ Photographs in the book show him writing on the roof of his car, soon after he has emerged from the railway station in Amsterdam and at Machu Picchu. Another secret: ‘Over a lifetime, I have written millions of words, but the act of writing seems as fresh, and as much fun, as when I started it nearly seventy years ago.’

He grants us a unique privilege by introducing us to all those close to him—his family, friends, colleagues and helpers—and in doing so, includes us in his inner circle. Many of us will wish he had told us more of this or that person—I could not help wanting to read about his interactions with Drs Roger Gilliatt and Michael Kremer at the Middlesex Hospital and the contrast in the ‘…brilliant but almost comically incongruous pair…’ is brought out effectively (pp. 33–37). The footnote on page 34 intrigues me as Dr Sacks points out that Professor Valentine Logue had unequal pupils. ‘We speculated endlessly as to why this was so, but Logue never enlightened us.’

I can go on in this vein at considerable length but have given you a feel of what is in store for you when you pick up this book. Dr Sacks added yet another classic to his literary output when he wrote it. Savour it.

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This book is written with clear objectives. There is a dearth of books and manuals on pressure ulcers. Physicians and surgeons often refer to books of specialties such as orthopaedics, neurosurgery, and surgery and plastic surgery. This book provides comprehensive information on pressure sores in one place.

The author covers all aspects of anatomy, physiology and microbiology. The contents are well explained with illustrations covering 17 sections that highlight the finer details needed for the holistic care of a patient with a pressure sore, including nutritional and psychological issues. Operative procedures and associated complications are described in detail. Various non-operative treatment options are also
discussed. Each anatomical site covered independently shows the vast experience of the author in this field.

The illustrative description through pictures is appreciable. The book can serve as a good handbook and guidebook for students with vast experience of the author in this field. The legends describe the images in detail. With clear images, the production quality of the book is impressive and the size of the book is handy and easy-to-carry. It is appropriately priced.

Treatment for bed sore is often denied owing to lack of expertise and awareness on the subject. This book fills the vacuum; hence highly recommended.

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This third edition, the first two being published in 2004 and 2006, is aimed at medical undergraduates. For its 1260-odd pages, this book is quite a handful and has been broadly divided into three sections—social medicine (~220 pages), preventive medicine (~470 pages) and allied subjects (~550 pages).

In terms of coverage of topics, epidemiology and statistics together have about 100 pages, which in my view is less. It has many unusual chapters such as how to write a proposal or a paper and make a presentation. Separate sections on ‘preventive traumatology’, mental disorders and preventive oncology are also laudable. The chapter on preventive diabetology covers the dietary recommendations well. The last chapter is on powerful health benefits of green tea that also includes some advice on tobacco, alcohol, sleeping habits, etc. Illustrations and pictures have been given throughout the book. While clinical aspects of most infectious diseases are covered in detail, measures for their prevention and control are not well covered. For example, the chapter on measles is mainly clinical and approaches to measles elimination are not discussed. For reasons which are not clear, it has multiple figures of the Chinese experience but nothing is described in the text (Why China? What were the lessons?). Current controversies and challenges in global polio elimination, the use of standard treatment guidelines for non-communicable diseases (NCDs), cancer registry, integrated approach to NCDs, health promotion, Haddon’s matrix for injury prevention, NCD surveillance and monitoring framework, etc. are important areas of community medicine in today’s context which are completely missing. There is a chapter on ‘Healthy People 2010’ which is for the USA! A quick check showed that it is now ‘Healthy people 2020’. Almost 200 pages are devoted to WHO Factsheets (many of them on topics already covered in the other chapters), which are directly from its website. As students can access all this information on the internet, it has only made the book thicker without adding any value. Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) is covered in half a page (p. 652) and is repeated on page 857.

Though the book has more than 600 colour illustrations, most of them are borrowed and none is acknowledged. There is a peculiar clubbing of photographs, for example Fig. 11.4 has both second cholera pandemic and diagnosis of dehydration in it. At places, the logic in the text is flawed—link to tables and photographs in the text are completely missing. Some chapters are only bulleted text. The legend of Fig. 26 reads as ‘cancer cervix and ultrasound probe’, but has no reference to it in the text which is a chapter on prevention of maternal mortality, and shows Fig 4.1 in its inset! Overall, the editorial quality is poor. Spelling mistakes abound including in chapter titles ‘Adolcent health’ (p. 613). The referencing is poor; e.g. some statistics are provided for India in the chapter on hypertension but are not referenced. Similarly, the classification of hypertension is not referenced. Indexing at the end is a weak point in most Indian books and this one is no exception.

Any new book on community medicine (there have been many in recent times), has to face two challenges—the ‘Park’ challenge and the vastness of the subject. Considering the wide scope of a book on community medicine, the size is always an issue and this perhaps has no correct answer. Park’s textbook crams a lot of information but does not cover conceptual issues. Most new books largely follow ‘Park’s’ approach and end up being ‘me too’ books. This book is no exception. Today, with rapid changes in the world, the discipline is fast changing but books on the subject are still stuck in the old mould. It would be a brave author who would clearly define and explain the core learnings in community medicine for today’s undergraduate student. I for one would not recommend that someone spends ₹1100 for this book. I would prefer to wait for a book that looks at this discipline with a fresh approach appropriate in the modern context.

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