

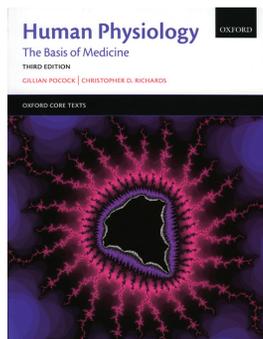
Book Reviews

Human Physiology - the Basis of Medicine. Gillian Pocock and Christopher D Richards. Oxford University Press, 3rd Edition, 2006. Paperback. 656pp. £36.99. ISBN 978-0-19-856878-0.

This well-established text-book, now in its Third edition, provides an attractive, authoritative and integrated review of organ function and systems interactions in the normal body. The authors have two particular aims – to emphasise cellular physiology and to discuss the relevance of normal function to disturbed organ function or patho-physiology. The clear diagrams and coherent text will attract the more thoughtful undergraduate students of Medicine or Science in their first or second years (over 600 pages and 1.8 kg weight). It gives a sound basis for later studies in Pharmacology and Pathology, and for good clinical practice.

The highlights for me were the excellent sections on the Nervous System and Reproduction, with coverage of the physiology of the mother, foetus and neonate. Cardiovascular and respiratory systems have thorough coverage. There is little material particularly relevant to students of Dentistry, but this could be easily remedied. Use of the Index is essential to obtain the full story on a particular topic. The references given at the end of sections and for each diagram should be an advantage when students focus on a particular topic in a ‘student-selected component’, now some 25% of the curriculum.

There have been dramatic changes in the undergraduate curriculum in the last 10 years. Now every Medical school has the freedom to achieve a different balance of knowledge between normality and disease within their course. Basic concepts of organ dysfunction are introduced from the start of many ‘integrated’ professional courses, creating problems for authors. Clinical Physiology is largely a separate section at the end of this text, but detailed content is lacking. This is a professional decision of the authors. Physiology and physiologists are concerned with normal organ function and system interaction. Their logical approach gives a background rationale that aids the transition from school biology to the multi-faceted, instant challenges of clinical life. Clinicians have experience and up-to-date knowledge in recognising and assessing organ dysfunction in the complex environment of the acutely-ill patient, where biological variation and multi-system failure are common-place. Using this text for a term in the Queen’s medical course I found a relative lack of material on topics such as electrolyte disorders and renal failure, the causes of autonomic failure and the long-term consequences of diabetes mellitus. Management of Type 2 diabetes frequently requires more than diet. Specific text-boxes could summarise the risks of hypernatraemia, hypokalaemia and hyperkalaemia (ventricular fibrillation is not mentioned). This book would be unsuitable as a preparation for post-graduate speciality examinations.



The attractive, discursive style of this text is particularly designed for a traditional preclinical course, as specified in the Preface. It would be a useful resource for ‘lost’ students, particularly those with a weak background in school Biology. However students of an ‘integrated’ curriculum would be at a loss when preparing for ‘case-based’ tutorials and examinations in years 1 and 2.

J Desmond Allen

Influenza: Human and Avian in Practice. Second Edition. Roy Jennings, Robert C Read. The Royal Society of Medicine Press, London. September 2006. Paperback, 80pp. £18.95. ISBN 978-1-85315-698-4

Influenza is a common respiratory tract infection responsible for considerable morbidity and mortality each year. A wide variety of clinicians will encounter patients in their clinical practice.

The current worldwide outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza (H5N1) has raised awareness of the spectre of another human influenza pandemic. This short (70 pages) text outlining the nature of influenza viruses, the complex epidemiology and potential evolution of a pandemic virus together with an update on management of seasonal influenza is the second edition (2006) of a work first published in 2002.

The stated readership target group is very general - “medical practitioners working in either the general community or industrial or company based practices”. We feel however that the book does not succeed in serving this target group. There is a wealth of technical detail which is likely to be well beyond the needs of a generalist readership. Additionally there is substantial overlap between the individual chapters.

There were also elements which are factually incorrect. On page 65 (Laboratory diagnosis) the authors mention “diagnostic techniques still at the experimental stage and not yet available for routine use include the polymerase chain reaction (PCR)” This is entirely erroneous, molecular techniques are widely available with a network of 19 labs covering the whole of the UK offering molecular diagnosis. In many areas PCR based techniques are the mainstay of both diagnosis on clinical samples and of sentinel surveillance schemes. The statement would have been true 5-10 years ago.

Much of the book covers material that is discussed in the influenza chapters of standard medical texts. Where the book gives added information is in Chapter 4. Chapter 4 entitled “Relationships between avian, mammalian and human influenza viruses” stands out as a useful discussion of the importance of the non-human species for medical practitioners.

The book concludes with an excellent list of websites from which up to the minute information can be obtained.

