

SECTION EDITOR: MURAD ALAM, MD

Users' Guides to the Medical Literature: A Manual for Evidence-Based Medicine

edited by Gordon Guyatt and Drummond Rennie, 736 pp (with CD-ROM), \$59, ISBN 1-57947-174-9, Chicago, Ill, AMA Press, 2002.

The *Users' Guides to the Medical Literature* is really a discussion of the use of evidence-based medicine by the McMaster University clinical epidemiology group, their former students, and their colleagues. I can think of no other term that seems to engender more distress among clinicians than the term *evidence-based medicine*. In conferences, perfectly sane, compulsive neurotically, rigorous basic scientists, become enraged when asked to describe the "evidence" behind their clinical decisions. Expert clinicians seem unable to understand why it is no longer acceptable to just state that a therapeutic decision is correct because it is what they do and their forefathers did. In fact, even bright, articulate dermatology residents seem to think that it is perfectly acceptable to make therapeutic decisions merely because a friendly attending told them to and feign ignorance of evidence-based approaches.

For more than 5 years, I have been fortunate to be able to teach evidence-based approaches to dermatology residents. I am uncertain as to my success, but at least in my presence they seem to grasp the essentials. However, I am aware that when I am not around they slip quickly into adhering rigidly to the mentor-apprentice method of decision making (ie, they do what they are told). During my tenure as an evidence-based lecturer, I have relied heavily on the instructional materials from the McMaster University group and their colleagues. These materials have been published in some of the finest

medical journals, including *JAMA*, *Journal of the Canadian Medical Association*, and the *Annals of Internal Medicine*. They are also available on the Web at <http://www.cche.net/CHE/home.asp>. These materials are frequently updated and refined, and are very user-friendly. All of these materials are wonderful resources to use in a didactic discussions or as background materials for a discussion of a specific clinical topic.

That brings us to the latest refinement of evidence-based learning materials from a group of distinguished clinical scientists, which is called the *Users' Guides to the Medical Literature*. Again, as with their previous materials, this is a wonderful resource. Unlike their other materials, all of the lessons are contained in one source document. Chapters in this book are highly integrated and an attempt has been made to separate essential evidence-based medicine material important to every clinician from material of greater interest to those who want to know more about the methods used by evidence-based practitioners. However, these materials may not be technical enough for those interested in conducting their own studies. For these individuals, I would suggest *Critical Appraisal of Epidemiological Studies and Clinical Trials* by Mark Elwood or an epidemiology textbook such as *Modern Epidemiology* by Kenneth Rothman and Saunders Greenland. These books are more technical in approach and not for the primarily clinical audience.

The *Users' Guides to the Medical Literature* is a wonderful teaching tool and resource. It should be owned by all clinicians, be they early in their training or near retirement. Perhaps a drug company marketing representative, who is not afraid to have their products closely scrutinized, should consider giving this book as a gift to a physician during a marketing visit rather than another pen or a box of doughnuts. I strongly suggest that anyone interested in patient care, who

knows little about evidence-based medicine, should own a copy of this book. In addition, the *Users' Guides Interactive* Web site is available at www.usersguides.org.

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Utility Index: Indispensable
Production Quality: Excellent
Primary Readership: Physicians (nondermatologists), clinical dermatologists, subspecialists in dermatology, allied health professionals, dermatologists-in-training, dermatologic surgeons
Value for Money: Bargain

Fast Facts— Minor Surgery



by Christopher J. Price
and Rodney Sinclair, 104 pp, with illus, \$24, ISBN 1-903734-01-0, Oxford, England, Health Press, 2001.

Price and Sinclair have composed a small, inviting paperback introduction to cutaneous surgery. The book is aimed at the primary care practitioner, for whom it seeks to demystify simple cutaneous procedures. An 8-part table of contents is itemized on the cover, where a different color is assigned to each chapter. Colored bars at the outer edges of the pages correspond to this scheme.

The chapters are "Operative Setup and Equipment," "Local Anesthesia," "Surgery and the Skin," "Treatment Planning," "Avoiding Complications," "Suturing Techniques and Removal," "Surgical Procedures," and "Examining Your Practice."

There are some excellent sections. Diagrams are frequently helpful and clearly presented. The technique for intact removal of an epidermoid cyst is elegantly illustrated, as is that for the correction of dog-ears. In addition to the attractive diagrams, the reader is treated to some sophisticated surgical in-

sights. The use of the hook is advocated to decrease tissue injury, and the book ends with a thoughtful exhortation to "audit" one's procedures so as to continually improve. There is a brief but useful treatment of nail surgery, an area of interest for Sinclair. Given the book's affordability, these admirable features alone may justify a purchase.

Unfortunately, at 100 pages, this book's size is barely adequate for the purpose of introducing beginners to cutaneous surgery. Significant omissions are inevitable. For instance, although intralesional steroid injections are mentioned as a treatment for hypertrophic scars and keloids, the type and concentration of steroid, and the frequency and technique of treatment are not. The book's brevity prevents the authors from providing a systematic approach that would guide a novice step-by-step through surgery.

Overall, this book is a concise introduction to surgery that nicely covers several topics. It is of greatest use to the nondermatologist beginning to perform cutaneous procedures. While we applaud the concept, we feel a second edition might be much more useful if substantially expanded. Doubling or tripling the number of pages would make it a handy tutorial and increase its relevance to a wider audience.

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Utility Index: Useful

Production Quality: Good

Primary Readership: Physicians (nondermatologists), allied health professionals

Value for Money: Good buy

eMedicine: Dermatology

Online medical reference available at <http://www.emedicine.com/derm/>, free access, William D. James and Dirk M. Elston, chief editors, St Petersburg, Fla, eMedicine.com, Inc, 1995-2002.

With the rapid expansion and growth of dermatology it is nearly impossible for a single textbook to provide up-to-date information with

current references and clinical photographs essential to dermatology. Though the major textbooks of dermatology provide an excellent basis for dermatologic education, their ability to provide cutting edge knowledge is limited by the lag associated with the traditional publication process. Textbooks are also difficult to transport and use as quick therapeutic references. Conversely, a multitude of review articles, published in dermatology periodicals, provide excellent and timely information. Unfortunately, the articles are scattered among numerous journals, making it difficult, if not impossible, to screen every issue of every periodical for desired data. Hence, the appeal of electronic medical publications, which are easily updated and readily available over the Internet. eMedicine's online dermatology reference is such a resource.

The eMedicine project began as an online emergency medicine textbook. Over the years as the eMedicine project took shape, additional specialty texts were added and editorial boards were established for each discipline. The project has since evolved from the limitations of a textbook to a comprehensive medical reference of review articles for professionals. Topics span the specialties from allergy to sports medicine. The site also incorporates 3 publications specifically for patients and their families. Approximately 20% of the visits to the site are from patients.

eMedicine.com is a Web site that proclaims that it has "the largest collection of medical review articles in the world." New articles are published on a monthly basis, and the authors and editors can update all articles 24 hours a day. Each monthly issue incorporates peer-reviewed articles from a wide spectrum of represented specialties. Review articles are structured to conform to 1 of 3 comprehensive formats, the "medical format," the "surgical format," or an "open format." The "open format" is designed for technical articles as well as for medical review articles that do not fit neatly into either the "medical" or "surgical" configuration. Formats ensure that major subtopics are included and that the text layout is consistently easy to navigate.

Currently, there are 425 dermatology review articles available online. An additional 170 written manuscripts are under editorial review. The number of topics covered in the eMedicine dermatology reference continues to grow as suggestions are made to the editors regarding the absence of certain pertinent topics. Due to the clinical emphasis of the publication, some of the review articles lack the level of pathophysiological detail required for dermatology board review or scientific research. However, most articles have an excellent set of references encompassing detailed articles and books on each subject. A box next to most of the references can be clicked to access the MEDLINE citation and abstract if available.

With hundreds of authors participating in the dermatology portion of the journal, the caliber and content of the review articles varies. However, quality is maintained by authorship requirements and the extensive editorial review process. At least one author of each article must be a board-certified or board-eligible dermatologist. In addition, there are 5 editors assigned to each topic. These include a copy editor, medical editor, pharmacy editor, continuing medical education (CME) editor, managing editor, and, finally, a chief editor. The chief editors for the dermatology section are William D. James, MD, and Dirk M. Elston, MD. A complete listing of the editors of the dermatology reference is available at <http://www.emedicine.com/derm/cover.htm>. This proves to be a long and distinguished list.

To supplement each article, authors may add clinical and/or histological images, as well as graphs and charts. All graphics have a zoom feature, allowing the reader to better analyze the details. A recently added feature is the ability to include relevant video clips. Following the text of each article is a short quiz, providing CME credit if desired. Extensive lists of references are uniformly included.

In addition to clinical reviews, the eMedicine site provides a large collection of "e-tools" such as a dermatome chart, body surface area algorithms, and a tool that can identify a medication by the letters and numbers imprinted on the tablet or

capsule. Patient information is also available on the *eMedicine* site, but has not yet been as well developed as the professional text.

eMedicine's content differs from that of the *Dermatology Online Journal*, which is not exclusively a compilation of reviews. The format of the *Dermatology Online Journal* approximates that of a standard peer-reviewed medical journal consisting of a combination of review articles, new studies, reports, and media reviews, as well as editorials. Like the *Dermatology Online Journal*, however, *eMedicine* takes advantage of the Internet's capability to provide numerous images that may be too costly to produce in print journals.

So how easy is *eMedicine* to use? The home page of the *eMedicine* Web site is overwhelming at first glance. This is due to the sheer volume of options and resources available at the site. Many features have been added over the years, which appear to have made the older, less sophisticated search interface obsolete. However, in the far upper left-hand corner of the home page, a simple search box remains. This can be used to search articles containing information about the topic of interest to the reader. A more sophisticated search interface, with filters, is also available.

A comprehensive listing of the dermatology review articles can be accessed by clicking on "Article Index by Specialty" listed at the top of the home page, and then clicking on "Dermatology" on the subsequent page. The "cover page" of the *eMedicine: Dermatology* online reference is then displayed. Menu buttons on the top of the "cover page" allow navigation to a table of contents logically divided into sections by subject matter. Topics may also be viewed in alphabetical order by clicking on the "Index" button.

The *eMedicine* reference is currently free to all users with Internet access and a Web browser such as Internet Explorer or Netscape Navigator. The site is supported by advertising on the Web site for a publishing company as well as several pharmaceutical companies. However, "Sponsors do not influence content," as per the disclaimers under the advertisements. The *eMedicine* collection is currently being sold

without advertisements to libraries and educational institutions. An advertising-free version is also available to specialty societies, allowing members of the society to earn CME credit, while generating revenue for the society. *eMedicine* plans to offer the entire collection on CD-ROM.

The *eMedicine* Web site is also accessible from a wireless Internet connection through a personal digital assistant (PDA) such as a Palm or Handspring. Using a Handspring Visor Platinum with an Omnisky Minstrel S wireless modem, one can execute a search to find and display review articles. Unfortunately, because of the page length limitations of the PDA's Web browser, many of the articles are truncated. Designing a PDA-friendly area of the *eMedicine* Web site with minimal extraneous text would greatly enhance usability for the growing number of physicians accessing the Internet through PDAs. Since large volumes of text can easily and quickly be transferred from a CD-ROM to a PDA, frequent publication of a CD-ROM version for transfer to a PDA may be an excellent alternative to the often slow and unreliable wireless Internet services.

Overall, the *eMedicine* Web site is an up-to-date reference for practicing dermatologists, residents, and students. The site provides a comprehensive, searchable, easily accessible collection of review articles in clinical dermatology, as well as numerous other specialties, at no direct cost to the consumer. Anyone with Web access can use the reference. Moreover, unlike much of the medical content on the Web, the articles in *eMedicine* are screened for quality by peers in the field. It remains to be seen if the *eMedicine* editors will be successful in their plan to maintain the currency and accuracy of this content through frequent author-driven revisions. At present, however, the site admirably provides a service not exactly duplicated by traditional textbooks or journals.

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Dr Bhatia is an author for eMedicine as well as for the Dermatology

Online Journal. Dr Nunley is an editor and author for eMedicine.

Utility Index: Important
Production Quality: Excellent
Primary Readership: Patients, physicians (nondermatologists), clinical dermatologists, allied health professionals, dermatologists-in-training, dermatologic surgeons
Value for Money: Bargain

**Sclerotherapy
Treatment of
Varicose and
Telangiectatic
Leg Veins, 3rd ed**



by Mitchel P. Goldman and John J. Bergan, 400 pp, with 490 illus, \$199, ISBN 0-323-01468-2, St Louis, Mo, Mosby Inc, 2001.

Sclerotherapy Treatment of Varicose and Telangiectatic Leg Veins is a third-edition text coauthored by Mitchel P. Goldman, MD, and John J. Bergan, MD. The preceding editions were written in an effort to present all of the available information necessary for the physician to obtain a working expertise in the treatment of varicose and telangiectatic leg veins. This extensively modified edition includes up-to-date information on diagnosis, evaluation, and treatment of venous disease.

The preliminary chapters are a concise review of the anatomy and histology of the venous system of the leg, and pathophysiology of varicose veins and telangiectasias. These sections contain excellent quality photographs and schematic diagrams, and provide the framework for the chapters to follow.

The heart of the book systematically reviews evaluation and treatment of leg veins. While sclerotherapy is the main focus of this text, other methods of therapy are also explored, including ambulatory phlebectomy, vein stripping, radiofrequency endovenous ablation, lasers, and high-intensity pulsed light. Complications and adverse sequelae of sclerotherapy are addressed in detail. This book is easy to read and is an ideal resource for medical students, residents, and physicians just beginning their training in phlebol-

ogy. At the same time, it is extremely detailed and well referenced and would be a valuable tool for the more experienced phlebologist.

At the end of the book is an appendix that contains a compilation of information about compression hosiery, manufacturers and distributors of sclerosing solutions, as well as informed consent forms, patient information sheets, postoperative sclerotherapy instructions, and other forms. These forms can be photocopied and used in the clinic. This section is invaluable to the clinician starting a phlebology practice.

In summary, this is a very well-written third-edition volume that presents new ideas, concepts, and facts, in addition to reviewing in detail the art of sclerotherapy. It serves as an easy-to-read guide for those just learning about the treatment of leg veins and as a useful reference for more experienced physicians. I believe that this is a brilliant work that dermatologists who treat leg veins should have in their library.

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Utility Index: Indispensable
Production Quality: Outstanding
Primary Readership: Clinical dermatologists
Value for Money: Good buy

Smart Medicine for the Skin: A Comprehensive Guide to Understanding Conventional and Alternative Therapies to Heal Common Skin Problems

by Jeanette Jacknin, 414 pp, \$16.95, ISBN 1-58333-098-4, New York, NY, Avery, 2001.

A 1997 JAMA survey suggested that approximately 42% of Americans pursued some form of complementary or alternative medicine, many without apprising their treating physician (JAMA. 1998;280:1569-1575). This burgeoning interest, during a

time of advanced technology and a vast array of modern pharmaceuticals, seems a bit peculiar. Perhaps practicing alternative medicine fulfills the patient's need to play a more active role in his or her health care, especially in this managed care era when physicians feel pressured to execute their healing art in "15 minutes or less." The virtually unlimited access to Web-based information and the expanding cost of modern intervention may also contribute to this upswing.

Smart Medicine for the Skin by Jeanette Jacknin, a board-certified dermatologist who integrates alternative therapies into her private practice, is a comprehensive reference book for the intelligent, motivated layperson interested in nontraditional therapies for skin disease. Myriad references on herbal treatments, aromatherapy, acupuncture, and mind-body medicine exist, but none are directed solely at the management of skin disease with such modalities.

This reasonably priced book opens with a fairly standard introduction to skin, hair, and nail anatomy and function, and includes simple sketches of basic structures. The earlier chapters touch on a range of traditional dermatology topics such as what to expect from a dermatologic visit to a description of common therapies including light therapy, electrosurgery, and cosmetic procedures. Also included is an extensive table with effects, both beneficial and adverse, of many currently prescribed traditional medications. Subsequent chapters describe both controversial and more readily acknowledged alternative therapies ranging from homeopathy to acupressure to biofeedback techniques.

The historical and cultural underpinnings of certain therapies are an entertaining addition to this section. The bulk of the book, in an A-Z format of common skin diseases, details both conventional and nontraditional therapies, with emphasis on the latter.

Dr Jacknin covers a large amount of material thoroughly yet succinctly and clearly possesses con-

siderable knowledge of complementary medicine. What may be criticized most about this book is the mere subject matter. Therapies substantiated only by anecdotal evidence rather than controlled scientific studies are often scoffed at by traditional medicine. A limited number of studies on alternative therapies exist, and the author does make reference to several. However, readers are left to their own devices to sort through the multiple suggested remedies and decide, probably by trial and error, which seem efficacious. Furthermore, the book rarely strays from a monotonous organizational format.

Although as physicians, we may question the validity of some complementary therapies, it is imperative that we have some knowledge of available alternative therapies since a significant and probably increasing number of our patients will consider them as treatment options. This book may also be useful for any practicing dermatologist wishing to expand his or her knowledge of this field and have a more enlightened answer to "do you know anything about XYZ herb, doc?"

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Utility Index: Useful
Production Quality: Good
Primary Readership: Patients, clinical dermatologists, and dermatologists-in-training
Value for Money: Good buy

Submissions

The *Archives of Dermatology* reviews books, journals, CD-ROMs, Web-based products, and other information sources of interest to dermatologists. We welcome the submission of review copies, which should be sent to the Book and New Media Reviews Section, *Archives of Dermatology*, 25 Boylston St, Suite 212, Chestnut Hill, MA 02467. Questions regarding the review process may be directed to the section editor at murad@alam.com.