

### **Epilepsy: 100 Elementary Principles**

3rd ed, by William H. Theodore and Roger J. Porter, ISBN 0-7020-1813-9, Philadelphia, Pa, WB Saunders Co, 1995.

This is the third edition of this manual on epilepsy. Since the previous edition in 1989, an additional author (Dr William Theodore, chief of the Clinical Epilepsy Section at the National Institutes of Health) has joined Dr Porter in preparing this book. Several additions in management in epilepsy have been included and the references have been updated to reflect developments in the field.

This book is not meant to be a detailed comprehensive review of epileptic disorders. Its main purpose is to give "100 elementary principles" that will assist primary care clinicians, general neurologists, and neurosurgeons in the management of patients with epilepsy. In the first chapter, the authors give a practical overview of approaching the patient presenting with probable epilepsy. Subsequent chapters cover the diagnosis of different epileptic disorders followed by therapy, including new surgical treatment options and special considerations in pregnant women. The authors should be commended for their attention to psychosocial aspects of epilepsy in chapter 17.

The language of the book is easy to read and most chapters have clinical case scenarios relevant to the topic discussed. The 100 elementary principles are well emphasized and highlighted throughout the book and are also included in the table of contents. One limitation of this book is that it lacks epidemiological data on epilepsy and that sometimes it was difficult for me to follow the flow.

In summary, this book is an ex-

cellent review of epileptic disorders. It offers relevant information for daily clinical practice. I recommend it as a useful reference for any clinicians that might be treating patients with epilepsy.

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### **Textbook of Family Practice**

5th ed, edited by Robert E. Rakel, 1754 pp, \$115, ISBN 0-7216-4053-2, Philadelphia, Pa, WB Saunders Co, 1995.

The wide scope of family practice is unique among all branches of medicine. Its diversity is both its greatest attraction and stiffest challenge. Any textbook of family medicine therefore faces the daunting task of providing not only a wealth of information that would typically be available in textbooks of multiple specialties, but also sound philosophical and ethical principles that furnish a framework for the delivery of comprehensive, competent, compassionate, and continuing care to patients of all ages. Rakel's *Textbook of Family Practice* endeavors to fulfill these goals.

One hundred twenty authors, many of them family physicians, have contributed to the 66 chapters of this book, which covers not only traditional subject matter such as pediatrics, obstetrics, gynecology, orthopedics, geriatrics, ophthalmology, internal medicine, psychiatry, otolaryngology, and emergency medicine, but also unique areas of interest including interviewing techniques, office surgery, the use of consultants, clinical genetics, travel medicine, and practice management. Over 1000 tables, illustrations, black-and-white photographs, and electrocardiogram tracings highlight the text.

Some especially helpful and informative charts and tables include exercises for patients with vertigo, principles of diabetic foot care, the Mini-Mental State Examination, a trip-planning questionnaire, and analysis of some popular weight-loss programs.

Preventive health care and periodic health examination recommendations are thoroughly discussed. There is a strong emphasis on psychosocial issues. In fact, the page count devoted to behavioral medicine, substance abuse, and domestic violence represents nearly 9% of the textbook. In contrast, sections on dermatology (2% of the text), gastroenterology (2%), and cardiology and electrocardiogram interpretation (5%) receive much less attention.

The finest chapter of the book, "Care of the Dying Patient," is a wise, sensitive, and thought-provoking discussion of what is likely the most difficult and perhaps uncomfortable aspect of being a physician. Valuable advice on controlling pain, managing the anorexia of advanced cancer, and even prognosticating is offered. Equally impressive is the analysis of the psychological and emotional needs of the dying patient and family. We are reminded that "silence is an enemy of the dying" and that "what physicians say to dying patients is not nearly as important as their willingness to listen." Another chapter, "Clinical Problem Solving in Family Practice," is a fascinating investigation of the search for diagnosis.

This textbook is a treasure trove of information that includes all sorts of odd and interesting facts. Where else might you learn that *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* likes to grow in the soles of sneakers or that patients with Pick disease have a tendency to explore objects with their mouths? Few books would list both the voltage in a lightning strike (10 million to 2 bil-

lion volts) and the average heart rate at orgasm (115-120 beats per minute). Would you ever guess that the average person has a symptom about every 6 days?

The single major criticism of this book is its redundancy. Many topics appear more than once. For example, diarrhea is discussed in 4 different sections of the textbook and circumcision techniques are presented in 2 different chapters. Similarly, many tables and charts are unnecessarily duplicated. Figures describing the Jones criteria for the diagnosis of rheumatic fever, causes of dementia, the adverse effects and dosing of antidepressant medications, and Papanicolaou smear classification systems all appear twice, while normal values of hemoglobin and hematocrit by age are found 3 times. Tighter editing and greater use of cross-referencing could reduce repetition.

Minor editing and typographical errors distract the reader. Examples include the misspelling of words like Inderal and methicillin. The recommended dose of aspirin in coronary artery disease is incor-

rectly listed as 325 g/d on page 780. The reference on page 1418 to Table 48-12 should actually be to Table 48-11. It is unfortunate that a reproduction of a medication record (Figure 61-14 on page 1632) lists erythromycin and Seldane (terfenadine) prescribed together on the same day. Although the potentially serious cardiac effects associated with the simultaneous use of these 2 drugs may not have been known in 1989, it is a poor choice of an example in 1995. It is also curious that a textbook of this size that is able to devote a paragraph to items like Churg-Strauss syndrome and hantavirus finds no space available for a discussion of Rocky Mountain spotted fever.

Chapter authors are occasionally paternalistic (or proponents of managed care), as when advising readers that since magnetic resonance imaging is costly, a neurological consultation should be considered to ensure that it is necessary. Some information is suspect or at least debatable, as evidenced by statements such as the one that elderly patients in nursing homes with

asymptomatic bacteriuria may benefit from treatment, and that a relative contraindication to thrombolytic therapy for acute myocardial infarction is age greater than 75 years.

Rakel's *Textbook of Family Practice* is a useful reference that would be most valuable to family practice residents and physicians preparing for board certification and recertification. Subspecialists wishing to retrain for careers in primary care would also benefit from a cover-to-cover reading of this book. Surprisingly, my own survey of nonacademic family physicians practicing in Illinois revealed that only 47% of them owned any textbook of family medicine. Furthermore, the references most frequently used in their everyday practice of family medicine were the *Physicians' Desk Reference* and *Conn's Current Therapy*. For physicians interested in obtaining a family medicine textbook, the fifth edition of *Textbook of Family Practice* is a reasonable choice.

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#### Announcement

##### Free Patient Record Forms Available

Patient record forms are available free of charge to ARCHIVES readers by calling or writing FORMEDIC, 12D Worlds Fair Dr, Somerset, NJ 08873-9863, telephone (908) 469-7031.