

Book review – Teledermatology

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Book review – Teledermatology is the art of obtaining a dermatological opinion when no dermatologist is present, due either to geographical constraints, difficulty of access to the patient or insufficient numbers of dermatologists

Teledermatology

Edited by Richard Wootton and Amanda Oakley.

London: RSM Press, 2002. Paperback, 331 pp, £24.95. ISBN 1-85315-507-1

<http://www.rsm.ac.uk/pub/bkwootton2.htm>

Teledermatology is the art of obtaining a dermatological opinion when no dermatologist is present, due either to geographical constraints, difficulty of access to the patient or insufficient numbers of dermatologists. This concise and well-structured volume addresses most of the issues involved in the establishment and running of a teledermatology system, with particular emphasis on practical experience from the US and Scandinavia.

I would have been delighted to have had access to the first section of the book when planning my own teledermatology project recently. The four chapters concerning technical matters—digital image processing, colours and illumination and camera specificity—were highly informative and, furthermore, eminently readable. They aptly succeeded in demystifying the technology which for so many of us is a disincentive to embracing the concept or practice of teledermatology.

The central sections draw on experience of teledermatological applications world-wide. Its use in the prison population and US military is examined, where emphasis is placed on the provision of services to an underserved population. The use of teleconsultations as an adjunct to, rather than instead of, a hospital visit is emphasised in the context of monitoring on-going wound care. I

would like to have seen a chapter regarding the use of teledermatology in prioritising patient care incorporated into this section. Teledermatology not only has a role in managing patient care, but can be pivotal in the education both of colleagues and patients. The development of an on-line dermatology atlas and on-line dermatological information for patients are exciting new ventures described in clear detail with a number of valuable Web sites listed.

The future developments in teledermatology are capably covered in the final section. In the UK, the government has pledged a commitment to evaluate the role of telemedicine in the provision of health care. There are, nonetheless, many unanswered questions which need to be addressed in greater depth before telemedicine, or specifically teledermatology, will be embraced in the UK. The thorny issues of 'gold standards' and diagnostic accuracy are paramount in establishing the safety of a teledermatology system, and I felt that too little emphasis and space was devoted to these vital issues in this book.

Teleconsultation is almost universally promoted as an alternative to face-to-face consultation rather than an adjunct to it in the monographs; I would have embraced a more holistic approach at times. Many British dermatologists feel uneasy

about teledermatology, and I would welcome a chapter confronting these issues and incorporating the views of the British Association of Dermatologists Working Party on Teledermatology http://www.ubht.org.uk/ederm/teledermatology_guidelines.htm. The overwhelmingly complex matter of economics is alluded to and discussed regarding real-time dermatology, but to date there is still inadequate data regarding the health care economics of teledermatology.

Despite these significant hurdles, teledermatology is still a tremendously exciting and stimulating field, and I feel that this volume despite certain omissions, is excellent and will fire enthusiasm and debate amongst dermatologists practising in this developing new area.

News item

EBD

The Centre for Evidence-based Dentistry <http://www.ihs.ox.ac.uk/ebd/>, an independent body promoting 'the teaching, learning, practice, and evaluation of evidence-based dentistry'. It is linked to the Institute of Health Sciences, Oxford.