

Book reviews

Clinical signs. (Colour guide). By Peter C Hayes and Derek Bell. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh 1996. 112pp. £8.50.

There has been a recent explosion in the number of colour guides and slide atlases specifically aimed at candidates sitting the MRCP and undergraduate examinations, and this book is yet another in this long line. The authors' stated aim is to illustrate the commoner classical clinical signs. There are chapters for each organ system and, at the beginning and the end, two sections are devoted to general signs and AIDS.

Each chapter consists of a series of colour and monochrome photographs on the right-hand page, with complementary text on the left. This arrangement generally works well except in certain chapters where the text is excessive and bears no direct relationship to the illustrations. The legends accompanying the photographs are in most instances inadequate and insufficiently descriptive of the clinical signs depicted. The inclusion of illustrations of clinical methods (testing for nail bed fluctuation, assessment of collapsing pulse etc) is not appropriate for a book of this nature. It is also inappropriate for photographs of radiological investigations and histology to be included, as the stated aim is to show typical clinical signs. The authors fail to include illustrations of clinical conditions which lend themselves admirably to a colour guide of this nature. For example, the endocrine section does not contain a single photograph of acromegaly (although one is found in the section on the head and neck but with no description), or hypopituitarism; nor does the section on neurological disorders

contain photographs of cranial nerve deficits. The quality of the photographs is patchy and in some instances quite poor (eg fig 27). Some clinical signs are not visible and better examples of some signs should have been available (eg periorbital puffiness in hypothyroidism).

In summary, the book falls short of delivering what its authors intended. Although the quality of its content is average, its deficits make it difficult to recommend it to its intended audience.

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Navigating the NHS: core issues for clinicians. Edited by Peter Lees. Radcliffe Medical Press, Oxford 1996. 150pp. £15.00.

Doctors are fortunate in still being able to anticipate a settled professional life. But in weighing up jobs, what signs indicate which of them will give the greatest scope to that most fulfilling of roles, the exercise of clinical knowledge and judgement in service to patients? What opportunities does a job provide for professional and personal development? Do young doctors know enough about the environment in which they will make their careers? Do they know enough about the NHS—the dynamics of its evolution, how it works and how doctors can contribute to its working?

Navigating the NHS: core issues for clinicians aspires to describe the NHS as a professional environment for clinicians in hospitals, and is directed towards those soon to apply for consultant posts. In a dozen brief chapters by different authors, aspects of the NHS are

described, progressing from history through managerial topics, to the roles of medical and clinical directors in Trusts. This is not an analysis of the present state of the NHS, rather the focus is on management process, not purpose or achievement. Readers may be surprised, however, by the inadequate and dated description of the NHS: no mention of the separate purposes of the Department of Health and NHS Executive (not yet a problem but think of the prison service), or of the abolition of the regional health authorities, the Private Finance Initiative for capital development, or of the formal assumption of responsibility by the new purchasing health authorities for general practitioner as well as hospital and community services. The first separation leads to incompatible policies: the rhetoric of a primary care led NHS and the transfer of clinical work from the secondary to the primary sector as opposed to the pressure to increase the numbers of patients treated in hospitals. The latter arrangements are immediately important to chief executives of health authorities and Trusts, for they will determine the contracts they negotiate and therefore the scale and nature of clinical services to be delivered. There is little in this volume about the development of strategy by health authorities or Trusts; how decisions are taken, on whose advice, and by whom. On all these matters, and many others, the most recent NHS Handbook produced by the National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts will provide a more comprehensive and balanced picture than the book under review.

Of particular concern to any new consultant is the competition for resources. The last three chapters outline a range of idealised committee structures and roles in Trusts, but in any unit it is the personalities within the system who determine how it functions. It is the individuals and circumstances peculiar to each post which