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## BOOK REVIEWS

### Evaluating the processes of neonatal intensive care: thinking upstream to improve downstream outcomes

Edited by Joseph Schulman. London: BMJ Books, 2004, £20.00, pp 145. ISBN 0 7279 1833 8



This book tackles the issue of quality of care from a rather different angle, challenging the reader to examine and optimise the processes involved in neonatal intensive care rather than focusing solely on individual outcomes. It seeks to unravel the complex interplay between

the many different components that contribute, directly or indirectly, to patient care. The book centres on the view that changes will only come about if we acknowledge that the neonatal unit and the people and activities within it function not in isolation, but within the context of a much larger system. Likewise, within the confines of the unit itself, a multitude of smaller systems operate together to produce what we have come to recognise as good patient care. It is the interrelationships between these systems that determine the effectiveness and quality of the care given. Likening the "system" of the neonatal unit to a production system, the author uses the methods successfully adopted by Japanese car manufacturers to illustrate ways in which this can be approached to improve quality and "customer service". At first sight, this may seem an inappropriate comparison, but the author convincingly outlines a number of parallels between the two.

A number of the methods suggested for improving the process of care seem obvious and appeal to a common-sense approach. However, there can be few who would not welcome simple and effective ways of avoiding unnecessary activities and achieving motivation of staff! The author stresses the importance of understanding the processes of care before we can successfully evaluate them. He then aims to equip the reader with the necessary tools to collect, analyse, summarise, and present data. Some methods covered, such as the use of sensitivity, specificity, and receiver operating characteristic curves in evaluation of diagnostic testing will be familiar

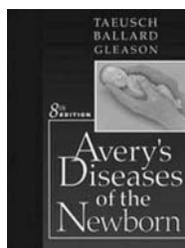
to many readers. Others, for example process mapping to break down a care process into bite-size components, Pareto diagrams to illustrate relative importance of problems encountered, and control charts may be techniques that have not been encountered previously. The specific techniques are explained clearly, using examples that are, for the most part, easy to follow. One could imagine being able to use them as adjuncts to the more familiar analytical and statistical methods. Recognising that change for the better cannot be achieved by analysis alone, but relies heavily on the personnel involved in implementation, the author helpfully devotes some time to this towards the end of the book. Lastly, a checklist summarising some of the book's important points is a useful addition as an appendix.

The book is short and easy to read, with a layout that is logical and accessible. Its style is friendly and chatty, if bordering on the patronising at times. The recurrent use of Japanese terminology can become rather tedious, but does not detract from the book's content, which is interesting and useful. It will be of particular interest to those whose work involves the organisation of data collection and analysis for clinical audit, governance, benchmarking, and research. However, any clinician who wishes to develop a deeper interest in the evaluation of care will find this book stimulating and informative.

E M Boyle

### Avery's diseases of the newborn, 8th edition

Edited by H William Taeusch, Roberta A Ballard, Christine A Gleason. Published by Elsevier, 2004, £89.00, hardback, pp 1598. ISBN 0721693474



*Avery's diseases of the newborn* has reached its eighth edition with a substantial update of all chapters. In reviewing it like any large textbook, it is necessary to formulate basic questions about its purpose. It is hard to imagine that

anyone would read every single word, yet almost all of us have at least one great tome sitting on our shelves, and, in many cases, they are simply gathering dust. Books like this are meant to be used in clinics, on the wards, or at home by our telephone, so that we can refer to them when a chance remark triggers a memory of something last heard of when we revised for the Membership examination! They make a good starting point for presentations when the alternative would be time spent in the library or on the computer (if you can ever get your children off yours!). Books like this will, no doubt, continue to be written and will, no doubt, also continue to be read.

My second thoughts on reviewing this book were "Where does this book sit within UK based neonatal practice?" It is a

collaborative work written by over 100 specialists, only one of whom currently works in the UK. The epidemiology, ethics, and whole ethos of this book are, not surprisingly, drawn from largely North American data and experience, and, it could be argued that the book is less relevant than Rennie & Robertson. Nonetheless the book is easily read and well referenced—for example, the chapter "Bacterial sepsis and meningitis" has over 90 references—thus making the book a good starting point for reading for any trainee project.

The delays between the writing of and the publication of large textbooks will always mean that they are almost out of date as soon as they are published, and this textbook is no exception. Newer synthetic surfactants containing proteins or polypeptides were first reported in medical literature as long ago as 1996, with several of these recently reaching the clinical trial stage, yet these developments are condensed to a single paragraph. Likewise discussion of surfactant use in conditions other than respiratory distress syndrome is also brief, with little mention of its use other than in meconium aspiration syndrome and pneumonia. Books such as this are meant to provide the necessary background information to allow the reader to do their own search of a topic, and in this respect *Avery's diseases of the newborn* works well.

There are some idiosyncrasies when it comes to the order of the chapters—for example, newborn resuscitation follows chapters on initial evaluation and routine care, and the chapter on surfactant treatment precedes those on respiratory failure in preterm and term infants.

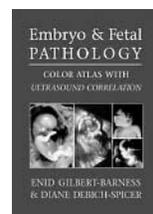
So faced with a choice between this book and Rennie & Robertson, which would I choose? Well if you can ignore the obvious North American bias, this is an excellent and very readable resource, and it is also considerably cheaper. If you do not mind the occasional trip to the library to look at Rennie & Robertson for a UK perspective of epidemiology and ethics, you could buy two copies of this book (one for your office and one for home) and still have change left for another textbook.

This book will certainly find a place on my shelf. I cannot see it gathering as much dust as some "great tomes" despite the fairly minor shortcomings mentioned above. I would recommend it to anyone looking to add a neonatal textbook to either their own personal or unit libraries.

S B Ainsworth

### Embryo & fetal pathology: color atlas with ultrasound correlation

Enid Gilbert-Barnes, Diane Debich-Spicer. Published by Cambridge University Press, 2004, £195.00 (hardback), pp 675. ISBN 0521825296.



Paediatric pathology has always been a shortage specialty, but recent criticism of pathologists in the United Kingdom has led to further recruitment difficulties within the field such that