



BOOK REVIEW

A Practical Guide To Paediatric Burns

By J Thomas and H Rode. Pp. 225. Illustrated. SAMA Health and Medical Publishing Group. 2006. ISBN 1-875098.

This 225-page, A5-size soft-cover book comprehensively covers how the burns team at the Red Cross Children's Hospital in Cape Town approaches and manages the thermally injured child. The hospital's burn facility is internationally and locally recognised as a centre of excellence in the management of these distressing injuries. Its head is South Africa's expert on paediatric burns, Professor Heinz Rode.

The book is edited and authored by Dr Jenny Thomas and Professor Rode, with co-authors (mostly also from this high-profile unit) contributing chapters on their areas of expertise. The 22 chapters take the reader through the expected route of the injury, its pathophysiology, the emergent management of the case, wound care, nursing, and occupational and physiotherapy. Dr Thomas is an anaesthetist whose expertise in burn care is shown in that more than a quarter of the book concerns itself with anaesthesia and pain management. These sections are exceptional, emphasising and telling what to do regarding these often neglected and difficult to implement aspects of care. Her contribution reflects on the magnitude of the anaesthetic staff's involvement in case care; there is also an aggressive in-theatre surgical approach to wound cleaning, dressing, debridement, and wound excision with immediate auto- or allograft cover, and advice on the liberal use of diverting colostomies.

However, this does down-relegate sections on the ward care of wounds and donor sites – where, what to use, how to

use, when to change, and on what type of wound could have received more attention. Something more than just grounding principles in the role of microbiology (germs) in the care of cases at all stages is also neglected, as is the ward management of nosocomial infections. These comments all circle around the cosmetic imperative applicable in paediatric burn patients when the injuries may not be life-threatening in nature and every effort should be made to heal the wound without the need to skin graft. This highlights the importance of wound care, a field in which knowledge and understanding have grown and continue to grow considerably, with coaxed epithelial resurfacing as its aim in superficial skin injuries. The absence of a significant section on plastic (cosmetic) surgical input is an oversight. The text is not indexed, but the chapters are colour coded and easy to refer to.

It is difficult to criticise excellence. This book should be read by South Africa's surgeons in training. Its title, which includes the words 'practical' and 'guide', could be misleading as the text reads as an educational tool for the already partially informed. The sections on sedation and analgesia outside the operating theatre and during change of dressings, transportation, and prevention – the watch words in burns injury – as well as personal input from survivors, parents, therapists, and surgeons on reconstruction and rehabilitation, support this impression. The book ends with information on useful drugs and drug doses.

If you are asked to treat these injuries, buy this book, read it, implement what you learn and keep it at hand as an information source.

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