



BOOK REVIEWS

Jane's Mass Casualty Handbook: Hospital Emergency Preparedness and Response

By Joseph A Barbera and Anthony G Macintyre. Pp. 344. US\$34. Jane's Information Group, Ltd. 2003. ISBN 0-7106-2592-8. (Available from SAMA-HMPG. Price R405, members R365.)

This American handbook is designed to assist emergency facilities and their personnel to prepare for, respond to, and recover from mass casualty incidents. It is not a comprehensive text, but provides general guidelines in a way that allows any hospital to make use of and apply the guidelines as circumstances dictate.

The authors are regarded as experts in hospital emergency plans and mass decontamination capability. They provided medical management in recent terrorist activities, including the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, and the Pentagon and World Trade Center incidents in September 2001.

The book is divided into sections that deal with the hospital's role, emergency preparedness, response to mass casualties, explosions, chemical and radiation preparedness, biological events, mass gatherings, and training exercises.

There is an expected American bias, with concentration on nuclear, biological, and chemical incidents. However, it is a useful and interesting handbook.

Clive Balfour

Managing Complications in Pregnancy and Childbirth. A Guide for Midwives and Doctors

Dept of Reproductive Health and Research. WHO. Illustrated. Pp. 448. Sw.Fr.40./US\$36. WHO. 2003. ISBN 92-4-154587-9. (Available from SAMA-HMPG. Price R165, members R145.)

This book is a joint publication sponsored by the WHO, UNFPA, UNICEF and the World Bank. It is available on the WHO website and provides a systematic, practical guide to information and skills necessary for the provision of midwifery services with the aim of reducing both perinatal and maternal mortality and morbidity.

The text is divided into three sections encompassing clinical principles, symptoms and procedures. The first section covers generic topics such as fluid management and the use of blood products, analgesia and anaesthesia, the principles of newborn care, community linkages, etc. The second part covers 'symptoms' and deals with common presenting problems in

obstetrics, such as vaginal bleeding, elevated blood pressure, labour with a scarred uterus, fever after childbirth and difficulty in breathing. The text avoids the classic approach to teaching by disease entity in favour of a syndromic approach based upon symptom complexes.

The final section on procedures is a practical guide to a number of mechanical and surgical obstetrical interventions, including some procedures that are no longer commonly performed such as symphysiotomy, craniotomy, culdocentesis and colpotomy. In the context of global obstetric practice, the unavailability of safe anaesthetic services may necessitate some of these interventions.

Overall, this is a comprehensive text mostly based upon sound management principles and provides unambiguous guidelines. The text is clearly set out with sufficient illustrations to allow the reader to develop a clear understanding of all practical aspects related to normal and complicated childbirth. However, many parts of the text reflect the necessary compromise between good clinical practice and the requirements of providing obstetrical services in an under-resourced environment. Hence, the chapter on pregnancy hypertension contains advice tailored to developing countries with little infrastructure and offers guidelines that may be considered unacceptable in many circumstances. For example, the authors suggest domiciliary care for women with 'mild' pre-eclampsia less than 37 weeks in gestation. They advocate almost no laboratory assessment of these pregnancies and arbitrarily suggest that the women should be regarded as having severe pre-eclampsia if the urinary protein increases.

Similarly the management of eclampsia, while basically acceptable, also contains some over-aggressive advice such as using bolus doses of hydralazine to treat hypertension, with a dosing regimen of 5 mg intravenously every 5 minutes.

In addition to these criticisms, insufficient attention seems to be given to the issue of referral and in the case of eclampsia, referral is only suggested when the patient has been oliguric for more than 48 hours or in cases of 'coagulation failure' or coma lasting for more than 14 hours. These guidelines reflect practice under extreme circumstances and should not be accepted as an adequate standard of practice in better-resourced environments.

In summary, while this is a useful and practical guide to obstetric practice, providing a basic approach for both midwives and doctors, large portions of the text should be read and interpreted with caution because the book has an extremely didactic approach.

John Anthony

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