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'Your Questions Answered: Stroke'

As a trainee hospital specialist my initial impression was that this book was not for me, but I was wrong. It forms part of the 'Your Questions Answered' series of books from Churchill Livingstone, aimed 'to appeal to GP's, nurses and other health professionals' the back cover informs us. However, the preface explains that although 'written primarily for GP's, it also hopes to address many questions...[from]...general physicians, neurologists in training, medical students, stroke patients, carers of stroke patients and the general public'. And therein lies the rub.

The contents of this book are extremely well suited to hospital doctors of a wide variety, but the style and layout is tailored to try and encompass the very broad readership hoped for. The pedigree of the author is not in doubt, and as might therefore be expected the writing is clear and succinct. Throughout the 359 pages there is a helpful synthesis of evidence and experience to inform discussion about both common and rarer issues, such as whether to close a patent foramen ovale (probably not it seems, p273). There are excellent chapters on risk factors and secondary prevention, and I enjoyed the discussions of diffusion and perfusion weighted MRI, differential diagnosis of amaurosis fugax, the explanation of antiphospholipid syndrome and so on. In other words the content is good and well referenced.

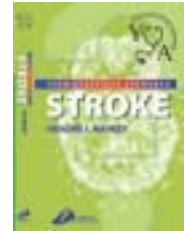
There is an attempt to fish out important facts (presumably for GP's, the main target audience), and to highlight side effects using icons. The 'important facts' were

indeed as billed, but the side effects icon served no purpose other than to remind us that drugs and interventions indeed have side effects. This comes to a head on pages 254-255 where eight of the nine questions answered display the eye-catching side effect symbol (the other being labelled an 'important fact')...and all this alarm about aspirin. The contents of these two pages are extremely clear and useful, but not enhanced by icon abuse to a prescribing audience familiar with the concept of side effects. Indeed might so many icons persuade someone less familiar with weighing up risks and benefits (the intended patient readership this time) to avoid aspirin at their peril?

For patients there is an attempt to answer common questions at the end of each chapter, but unfortunately I suspect that even some of these might prove rather difficult to unravel for patients (despite explanation of homonymous hemianopias and suchlike), yet provide little new information for doctors not already covered in the main body of text.

I understand that publishers need to maximise sales, but in this case I worry that the intended breadth of readership might prove an achilles heel, and result in a good book being missed by hospital doctors (who would benefit most from its contents) and not so well received by its main target audience.

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Author: Graeme J Hankey
 Publisher: Churchill Livingstone
 ISBN: 0443071462s
 Price: £19.99

Single-case and small-*n* experimental designs: a practical guide to randomisation tests

Classical parametric and non-parametric analyses make assumptions about how experimental data is related to the population from which it is drawn, which are valid for large series but less so in small series. Randomisation (or exact) tests use the real experimental data and make far fewer assumptions about its distribution and are therefore more appropriate in studies with less than 10 in each group, or single cases with less than 50 observations.

This book explains the arguments for and against statistical, as opposed to visual, graphical analysis in single case studies, and in general it should be possible to design a study to allow both. Randomisation tests require a lot of computation, which has only been widely available as personal computers became more powerful. Even now it may take several minutes for each analysis, as opposed to a few seconds with classical parametric tests.

Fortunately a CD containing macros to do the analysis using Excel, SPSS or Minitab is included with this book. Eight different study designs and their analysis are explained, and worksheets are included on the CD in

which to enter your experimental data. These range from a single case cross over design, in which the time of change from baseline to intervention is chosen randomly, to a small group repeated measures test. The power of these tests to identify a particular outcome is also described, and references to help design your own specific tests are given.

This clearly written and easily read book is very useful source of information on how to design single case and small case studies with a view to statistical as well as visual analysis. I have found it difficult to find such advice, and the software solution to analyse the results, elsewhere. I think this book would be very useful addition to any department planning single case and small series research, and its modest cost will immediately be offset by the savings from not buying exact tests modules for other statistical software.

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Author: John B. Todman & Pat Dugard
 Publisher: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, New Jersey & London
 ISBN: 0-8058-3554-7
 Price: £47.95