Essential Neuropharmacology: The Prescriber’s Guide

Essential Neuropharmacology: The Prescriber’s Guide is a reference guide featuring the most commonly used drugs in neurological practice. The text is designed to be accessible and easily readable for neurologists at all stages of training, both for background reading as well as quick reference on the wards or in clinic. Each drug is presented systematically using consistent subheadings. Therapeutics presents basic pharmacology such as method of action, common indications and onset of action. Adverse effects describes common and life threatening adverse effects and how to address them correctly. Dosing and use describes usual dosage range, dose increments, tapering doses and symptoms of overdose. Special populations describes alterations that may be necessary in patients with chronic renal failure, hepatic failure, pregnant women and those breast feeding. The art of neuropharmacology provides a brief narrative overview of the main advantages and disadvantages as well as ‘pearls’ summarising the most important aspects of treatment.

By its remit, the book is ideal for use in the clinical environment and the authors have released an ‘App’ to facilitate this use – a well-judged addition, taking into account the frequent sightings of ‘smartphones’ in the current clinical environment!

As a junior neurology trainee, you might imagine I would be in the optimal position to review this ‘App’. However, it is at this stage that I must confess to my ‘technophobe’ status. Yet, like many I recently ventured to purchase a ‘smartphone’ and I was very pleased to be asked to trial the Essential Neuropharmacology ‘App’.

The ‘App’ is essentially an electronic version of the book. There is a contents page allowing rapid navigation to a particular drug. When selected, the drug reference is presented as it is in the paperback, allowing the user to browse the information. The interface is intuitive, even for the ‘smartphone’ novice.

The feature of the ‘App’ most useful in the clinical environment is the concise presentation of the drug reference. Simple sub-headings such as ‘What to do about AEs’ coupled with the bullet-point presentation allow the user rapidly to navigate the ‘App’ and find information to answer specific questions. For example, titration regimens for specific antiepileptic drugs are provided in detail. Frustratingly however, there are some notable omissions and these omissions tend to be the more novel agents in whose use questions are most likely to arise. An overview of alemtuzumab, for example, could be very useful but this drug does not feature.

Written as a concise summary, there is predictably little explanation, which is the text’s primary limitation. However, for its purpose as a quick reference, particularly as an ‘App’, this is to be expected. Additional limitations include the small font without the ability to zoom in, compounded by the permanent menus encroaching further on the screen size. The text is difficult to read for any substantial period of time on the kind of pocket device for which it is designed.

The ‘App’ certainly proved successful as a reference guide in the clinical environment. Perhaps the biggest hurdle for its use is your colleagues’ and patients’ suspicion that you may be engaged in social networking rather than reviewing neuropharmacological options!

Muscular Dystrophy Volume 101 (Handbook of Clinical Neurology)

This book on Muscular Dystrophies is an invaluable addition to the Handbook of Clinical Neurology series. With the great strides in our knowledge and understanding of the heterogeneous conditions often randomly grouped together under the heading of ‘muscular dystrophies’, this book helps bring some order by classifying into chapters the different forms of muscular dystrophies based on our current molecular and genetic understanding of these disorders.

Importantly, the phenotypical descriptions of the different muscular dystrophies are provided in some detail, allowing the book to be a useful source of reference. In addition, laboratory and radiological features are also described, where available, adding to the strength of this book as a source of reference. There is some detail of molecular mechanisms of the different conditions, where known, which can point the interested reader to the relevant literature for further reading if he or she so wishes.

The chapters of the book are authored by leading figures in the neuromuscular field, ensuring the material is as relevant and as up-to-date as a textbook possibly can be. The book contains clinical photographs of some of the more common conditions. One criticism is that some of the photographs appear relatively old and difficult to make out (for example those of the facial features of myotonic dystrophy in Chapter 15). Better quality photographs would have added immensely to the visual appeal and clarity of the book. Diagrams and figures clearly help illustrate descriptions in the text, while tables provide good summaries of important areas.

Overall, this book is probably aimed at neuromuscular specialists or dedicated students of the science of neuromuscular diseases. With such a fast moving field, the very latest developments will inevitably be missing. However, the book provides a strong foundation for the understanding of muscular dystrophies for those learning and for the learned; I highly recommend it.