Hot off the press for 2010, this is one of the small Oxford Specialist Handbooks. While not targeted at occupational health physicians, it is, nevertheless, of interest to all doctors. The editors have drawn together the experience of another 32 specialists in their field. For those who appreciate the tactile attraction of books, as I do, this small volume (you can almost completely cover the book with one hand) packs a mighty punch in its 477 pages.

‘A surgical complication is any undesirable, unintended, and direct result of surgery affecting the patient, which would not have occurred had the surgery gone as well as reasonably hoped’ (Adedeji et al., World Journal of Surgery 2009). The justification for this handbook is asserted succinctly by the editors. ‘Complications following surgical procedures are associated with significant morbidity and mortality, add immensely to the psychological burden of the patient, and are disappointing for the surgical team’.

The handbook is well structured and the contents are assembled logically and in a readable style that uniquely offers the student the option of reading from cover to cover or picking out a specific topic for reference. The first 133 pages are focused on general complications, which include post-operative pain, infections, nutritional state, pressure sores and complications related to the use of medicines in surgery.

The second part of the book deals with complications following specific types of surgery including inter alia, vascular, gastrointestinal, urological, breast and hand surgery. There are 8 chapters on general complications and 16 chapters on specific surgical topics. Each chapter is both comprehensive and concise. The index at the back has the sort of utility that befits a handbook that may be required for rapid reference. There is an extensive section at the beginning of the handbook, which details eight pages of symbols and abbreviations. Students need no longer feel perplexed by TRIM, TRISS and TRUSS (transfusion-modulated immunomodulation, trauma and injury severity score and transrectal ultrasound).

In his foreword, Professor the Lord Darzi of Denham asserts that the handbook is ‘comprehensive, up to date, logically presented and should be a useful pocket book, with wide appeal, for trainee surgeons, medical students and allied professions’. But a unique application for this specialist handbook may not have been recognized by either the editors or the authors as I think that it is a very handy reference and a window on the world of surgery in general that would be of interest to authors of fact and fiction, who write about medicine and surgery in a wider context. Certainly, I can see a use for it in my own writing endeavours.

This specialist handbook certainly meets the needs of the target audience for whom it represents great value for money. I would not expect it to sit on the shelves of the majority of occupational physicians but knowing that it is in the library will reassure. Of course it also makes an
inexpensive gift for medical students and doctors in training.

Rating

★★★ (Borrow from the library)

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