

BEDSIDE ICU HANDBOOK

edited by D Y H Tai and T W K Lew

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263 pages, available from Corporate Services, Tan Tock Seng Hospital at S\$15.00

This handbook serves an important function for Intensive Care Units in Singapore. It is a collective effort of 35 specialists in 5 different institutions in Singapore. The 263 pages are packed with very useful information outlining the current diagnostic and therapeutic practices in the four ICUs at Tan Tock Seng Hospital and the National Neuroscience Institute. It was never the editors' intention to produce a standard ICU text and indeed there are many such excellent references available on the market. Rather, the editors had intended this book to be for quick reference and for that, the editors have done an excellent job.

The book is made up of 19 sections rather than chapters and the reader requires some adjustment in discovering where to look for the topic of interest. The topics are mostly in alphabetical order, although the first section on "Critical Care Pharmacology" comes before "Acid Base Disorders", possibly because the Pharmacology section would be one of the most common references in the ICU handbook for doctors working in ICU for the first time. There is no index and this is my main criticism of the book—the practising doctor may have difficulty finding the information that he wants when confronted with an acute case.

The topics chosen are very relevant to intensive care practice. They are written in point form. No explanations are given with regard to the rationale of the recommended therapy. Basic understanding of pathophysiology of critical illness and a background clinical knowledge are required to enable the reader to get the most out of this book.

There are a few attempts to describe common ICU procedures. In particular, the authors are to be congratulated on their description of the central venous cannulation technique as well as the method of insertion of the pulmonary artery catheter. However, many bread and butter critical care procedures such as how to secure the airway, how to set a ventilator, or how to insert a chest tube were omitted. The approach to difficult airways was listed in the trauma section and a reader may have difficulty looking for such information at the bedside.

The strength of the book lies in their approaches to critical care problems. A reader, once he locates the appropriate section on the problem faced, will within a few minutes derive sufficient information to initiate the correct investigations and therapy to tide the patient over before definitive assessment and therapy starts. The approaches described are simple to follow, much like a cookbook, and reflects closely the consensus views of critical care specialists. Medical students and trainees in particular will find these facts useful in their preparations for their examinations.

The flow charts and illustrations in the book are helpful. However, the CT scan photos are very badly done. They should be printed on better quality paper. The photos are also too small, making it difficult to distinguish salient points supporting the diagnosis made in the CT scan.

In summary, this is a book I would like to have despite my criticism of the lack of an index. The facts that the authors managed to cram into this book make it good value-for-money for anyone who has to manage critically ill patients. It will also be useful reference for exam candidates looking for answers to approaches to many acute medical problems.

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