

Basics in Medical Education

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Published by World Scientific Publishing Co Pte Ltd, PO Box 128, Farrer Road, Singapore 912805

ISBN 981-238-209-7, 400 pages, US\$52.00, £38

These are challenging times for medical schools as the frontiers of knowledge have expanded enormously and rapidly in recent years. In order to keep up with the expanding knowledge and to impart it effectively and efficiently to our students, we as medical teachers will have to adopt new changes in learning and teaching paradigms. Unfortunately, many medical teachers do not always adopt these changes as readily as they accept the rapid advances in medical science. Prof Lee Eng Hin, former Dean, Faculty of Medicine, National University of Singapore, aptly put it in the Foreword of this book: *“One of the most important factors (why the medical schools are so reluctant to change) is the fear of the unknown – a substantial lack of knowledge about the science and art of teaching and learning in medicine. Ignorance breeds fear and fear perpetuates the collective inertia.”* I believe the timely publication of this book will help to rectify this ignorance and allay this fear.

This book is suitable for all healthcare professionals but is especially directed towards medical teachers in the Asian region as many medical schools in this part of the world are introducing new curricula and adapting new teaching methodologies. It is great effort as it encompasses a wide spectrum of medical educational topics, from concepts to instructional methodologies.

As stated in the Preface, *“in this simple non-intimidating book, we promise to tell the general medical teachers what they need to know about medical education. We strive towards making the book a readable, jargon-free, precise yet complete guide to teaching and learning in medicine.”* I think the book has fulfilled its stated objective as the vast majority of the 38 chapters are well written, comprehensive, provide much local data and are readable. Each chapter starts with a set of clear objectives to give the readers a quick idea about its content. There are text boxes and tables within the chapters to highlight important points. Each chapter ends with a summary of take-home messages. All these are strengths of the book.

I particularly like the way the 11 sections, 38 chapters and all the subheadings have been clearly listed in the Contents so that the reader should have little trouble in discovering where to look for the topic of interest. The section on “Assessment and Evaluation” is one of the better written sections as it provided practical points in guiding medical teachers in the conduct of student assessment and evaluation.

I can find few faults, except for two areas. Firstly, although the book is readable and well written, it tends to be too wordy in several chapters and this is my main criticism of the book – clinical teachers, who are busy practising doctors, may have difficulty finding the time to go through the book to find the information that he or she wants. Secondly, although the book is comprehensive and explains the teaching issues well, it could be improved by including more practical “tips” for medical teachers. In this respect, more generous use of case studies to place factual contexts into actual situations may help to facilitate learning and application, especially for clinical teachers.

There are a few other areas that may be improved but these are merely minor points. I would have liked some mention on medical ethics teaching, since this is a “new”: area which many medical teachers find challenging to teach. While it is difficult to cover all the topics equally, there are topics specifically for clinical teachers that could be included or expanded further, such as bedside teaching, use of simulators, and student internship programme. I noted a minor printing error in page 243 where the text stops abruptly but continues overleaf.

It is commendable that the textbook is written by two Singapore doctors, Dr Zubair Amin and Prof Khoo Hoon Eng, and published in Singapore. They are to be warmly congratulated for having written a very useful book. I strongly recommend this textbook to medical teachers, and particularly all my colleagues in the Faculty of Medicine, National University of Singapore.

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