

BOOK REVIEW

COMPANION HANDBOOK TO 11TH EDITION OF HARRISON'S PRINCIPLES OF INTERNAL MEDICINE 1988

This companion handbook is a handbook and not a reference book which is the 2 volume textbook itself. It is meant to be easily hand-carried and as the Editor noted, "meant to be used when the resident or student requires a brief introduction to a reminder of an aspect of clinical internal medicine but does not have immediate access to *or the time* to consult Harrison's." I have *underlined* the words — how true! The reference text is today within a student's budget for books but there is no time nor perseverance to read it. The comment often heard with regard to Harrison's is it is a tough-going, often dry, laborious exercise to first read one chapter. Concentration is often short lived. What a welcome then this handbook is.

Most chapters are short; an exceptional one is nine small pages long — chapter 22 on "Electrolytes/Acid-Base Balance". Another long one is eight pages of two tables 30-1 and 30-2 listing antimicrobial and antiviral therapy which is useful but as stated in the Notice in the handbook, "Readers are advised, however to check the product information sheet included in the package of each drug they plan to administer . . ." especially "in regard to new or infrequently used drugs."

It is of course not possible to condense every section of Harrison's into this small volume profitably. Neither would that be worthwhile. They have "condensed the *clinical* portions of Harrison's into this pocket-sized companion handbook . . .". Its intended use? The book is to accompany the doctor through the hospital, hopefully in a large coat pocket or in a brief case. Unfortunately its small size is still too large for the usual largest pockets of the Singapore medical students' or doctors' white coat. In comparison the little "Red book" in Acute Medicine is more easily carried around and frequently used. Likewise the Ministry of Health's paediatric handbook.

The Editors have thoughtfully left one or two blank pages interspersed between chapters for "Notes". This may be useful to many a student or doctor but a conservative estimate for 190 chapters means 190 blank pages out of about 800.

For more detailed discussion of the topic the reader is referred to chapter ab, HPIM-11 pg xyz. HPIM-11 refers to Harrison's Principles of Internal Medicine — 11th Edition. So it seems unlikely that you would purchase only this Companion Handbook without the "real" reference text and face the frustration of not being able to indulge further into the clinical problem at hand. Nevertheless, the set of three books costs around \$100 and is worth the purchase.

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