Book reviews

Making sense of the ECG: cases for self-assessment

Editors: Houghton A, Gray D
Publisher: Hodder Arnold, London, 2009
ISBN: 9780340946893
Price: £18.99

A wealth of ECG textbooks exist but this pocketbook tackles ECGs with a remarkably practical approach while still providing essential knowledge. The entire book reads in landscape and each of the 70 cases begins with a two-page spread of a 12-lead ECG or rhythm strip followed by the patient's history, examination and investigations. The subsequent questions not only relate to what the ECG shows, but to mechanisms, causes and management. Fortunately, questions are limited to four per case so as not to overwhelm the reader.

All is made clear on the next two-page spread in the book. A comprehensive table encompassing rate, rhythm, axis, p waves, PR interval, QRS duration, T waves and QTc interval for each ECG is a great way to polish one's systematic ECG interpretation. The answers provided are concise and written in a conversational style as if hearing a response from a post-take ward round. A more complete discussion follows in the commentary presented as conversational but, at times, bulky bullet points. This is mainly to revise concepts brought out from the case. Should new material be presented, the authors cleverly cross-reference pages from their companion text *Making sense of the ECG, third edition*. One drawback is that the key messages are somewhat lost in the text and may have been better highlighted in a box.

Although the cases are placed randomly, an ample index allows this to act as a reference text of ECGs. Basic information is also provided on other aspects of cardiology, ranging from acute coronary syndromes and precordial thumps to reveal devices. It does not, however, list the normal values for ECG parameters, which would have been a valuable addition.

I would highly recommend this book to medical students, junior doctors and nurses. The mixture of ECGs keeps motivation high and the excellent layout allows for 'dipping in and out' if time is limited. The information presented is relevant to everyday clinical practice and creates connections throughout cardiology making this a useful and interactive revision text. It is an ECG book that combines basic principles with a logical approach to clinical scenarios yet is packed with facts, is easy to read and comes in a practical size. The reader is left with confidence and enthusiasm to maintain their ECG interpreting skills.

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Novel techniques for imaging the heart

Editors: Di Carli MF, Kwong RY
Publisher: Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford, 2008
ISBN: 9781405175333
Price: £62.99

With advances in cardiac imaging modalities, this book provides a comprehensive and up-to-date overview of cardiac computed tomography (CT) and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). The book is edited by Marcelo Di Carli and Raymond Kwong from Harvard Medical School, US, leading figures in their respective fields.

Novel techniques for imaging the heart is one book in a series produced by the American Heart Association in accordance with their mission of "building healthier lives, free of cardiovascular diseases and stroke", aiming to provide the latest information on physiology, diagnosis and management - cutting edge topics in cardiology that are relevant to clinical practice.

The many advances in cardiac imaging, particularly newer technologies such as multi-detector CT and CMR, are enabling superior quality imaging and the gaining of evidence to improve their application to cardiovascular disease.

The book is divided into three sections to give a systematic approach from basic principles to advanced application of these technologies.

Part one gives a succinct account of the basic concepts and principles of cardiac CT and MRI, including chapters on contrast agents and safety considerations in differing situations.

Part two is particularly useful as it describes an overview of these modalities in specific clinical scenarios. It covers their use in coronary artery disease, heart failure, peri-operative risk assessment, electrophysiology and valvular heart disease. It also covers hybrid imaging (PET CT) and provides a critical review of the current stress imaging and the role for these investigations in risk assessment.

Part three is the climax of the book covering exciting technical and advanced applications of these modalities and their use in emerging roles in stem cell therapy, image-guided catheter intervention and imaging myocardial mechanics.

Whilst these modalities are not found in every district general hospital at present, it is still relevant to any cardiologist or even radiologist wishing to broaden their knowledge. The book is intended for trainees in cardiac imaging although it also serves to provide a good overview to any trainee. It is also suited to academics or anyone who wishes to gain an up-to-date understanding in these rapidly advancing fields.

The text is well written and gives a good overview of non-invasive imaging techniques. There are extensive figures as well as a companion CD that includes figures from the book and 40 video clips referenced to the text. This book is worth considering whether you wish to gain an insight or a more detailed understanding into either of these modalities.

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