

## Book review

Minor illness or major disease: The clinical pharmacist in the community

4th edition

C. Edwards and P. Stillman.

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A cursory comparison of the early editions of textbooks on responding to symptoms and the most recent editions currently on the bookstore shelf will reveal a considerable shift towards a larger medical tome-like appearance. Does this shift towards larger, more comprehensive case study based texts reflect the growing importance of this skill to the practising community pharmacist or is it a publishing trend to grab a wider audience?

Certainly the pharmacists response to the Government's self care agenda; the challenge offered by the continuing de-regulation of prescription only medicines and changes to the NHS contract for community pharmacists has meant that the need for good useful texts on responding to symptoms and associated services is greater than ever.

The authors have kept the same basic format as in previous editions with some interesting new features. They have extended the herbal remedies advice and a "second opinion" section which provides an insight into the GP's approach to the previous discussions. This extra section has thankfully avoided the judgemental approach of other texts who ask notional GP's to comment on the pharmacists decision.

The book's original scope has been extended and is now divided into two parts. Part A, *Responding to Symptoms* deals with the diagnosis and treatment of minor illnesses that present to the community pharmacist. Their approach remains one of taking a careful medical history in enabling the pharmacist to make a rational decision as to whether the symptoms presented are suggestive of a minor or major illness. Use of the "Sit down, Sir" mnemonic as a guide means a more flexible, enquiring approach is facilitated in comparison to the popular formulaic WHAM process. The style of writing benefits from the teaming

up of a pharmacist and doctor and supports the distinct triage role of the community pharmacists.

Part B, *Preventative self-care* concentrates on pharmacist interventions which can reduce health risks and potentially protect the public against ill-health. It includes chapters on smoking cessation, cardiovascular disease, emergency hormonal contraception and travel health. Part B reflects current practice but is not as comprehensive as Part A. It will not be of much use to experienced pharmacists but will serve as an orientating starter for undergraduates.

The inclusion of these extra chapters means that the book's title has been amended. "Responding to symptoms" has been replaced by "The clinical pharmacist in the community". I am sure this is as a result of many hours of heavy brainstorm sessions at the publishers but descriptors such as pharmaceutical care or pharmacy practice in the community may have been more original choices and would have avoided recollections of the old negative demarcations within the profession that "clinical" encourages.

Helping the community pharmacist manage an effective response to symptoms routinely presented in a pharmacy remains at the core of this book. This edition retains the clear uncomplicated presentation of previous editions and the inclusion of ample line drawings and colour photographs throughout the text is a major feature. The authors have retained and improved the excellent "summary of conditions" and "when to refer" précis's at the end of each chapter. The substantial, well-organized index is a further asset. Taken as a whole this book will assist both the newly qualified and experienced pharmacist with the recognition of common medical complaints and

continue to provide a readily accessible guide to the warning symptoms for referral.

The case studies provide a rich source of reflective material but sit uneasily with the rest of the text and may be best included as a CPD-linked appendix for further study with associated self-assessment questions and feedback.

The Edwards and Stillman partnership has once again provided both undergraduates and practicing community pharmacists with an excellent textbook which reflects current and near future practice.

However, time will tell whether the shift to a more comprehensive larger text means that practicing pharmacists will use the new edition more in response to an identified learning need as part of their Plan and

Record action plan than as a hands-on guide to be used at the time of a patient consultation.

This new edition compliments rather than competes with Paul Rutter's Community Pharmacy text and taken together with an up to date PAGB OTC Directory provide the teacher practitioner with a rich source of teaching and learning material. Material which when adequately mixed with their own experiences should enable undergraduates and pre-registration students gain a start in effective counter prescribing and provision of services linked to the new NHS contract such as minor ailment schemes and assessing health risk.

Reviewed by Dr Carl B. Martin July 2006