The Handbook of Antibiotics can be a useful addition to the family physician’s library. Although called a handbook, it is really a small 655-page softcover text. It is quite up to date, more comprehensive than most of the pocket handbooks, yet not as expensive as a textbook of infectious diseases. At its cost, it is priced appropriately.

Ronald H. Goldschmidt, MD
San Francisco General Hospital
University of California—San Francisco

Joslin’s Diabetes Mellitus


The 13th edition of Joslin’s Diabetes Mellitus is a detailed, heavily referenced text that covers all aspects of the management of patients with diabetes mellitus, including pathogenesis, treatment, and complications. The authors are largely drawn from the Joslin Clinic in Boston, Mass, but the editors have also recruited authors from other institutions, encouraging authors to put more emphasis on findings from the literature rather than just describing the local experience and practices at the Joslin Clinic. The most useful section for the family physician is the treatment selection, in which all of the modalities used to treat the various forms of diabetes mellitus are described in detail, with excellent reviews of the literature, and include chapters on education, diet, exercise, insulin therapy, use of oral hypoglycemics, psychosocial aspects of care, and management of hypoglycemia. Chapters on the treatment of diseases common to patients with diabetes mellitus, such as hypertension, hyperlipidemia, and obesity, are clinically relevant and practical. A chapter on economic and social costs will help family physicians understand not only the large cost of this disease to society but the high cost of treatment modalities to individual patients as well. An added bonus is an appendix, written just before publication, describing the recently published results of the Diabetes Control and Complication Trial in which adults with insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus were randomly allocated to conventional vs intensive insulin treatment. Patients randomized to intensive insulin treatment were in much better diabetic control, with a much reduced rate of diabetic complications over the 5 to 7 years of the study, but suffered a three times greater incidence of hypoglycemia and other assorted complications, including weight gain. The results of this trial do not significantly alter the recommendations discussed in the previously written chapters on treatment.

The treatment of complications is also covered very nicely. Diabetes mellitus can affect almost every organ system in the body and, indeed, there is a chapter on virtually every organ system, with particularly relevant chapters on foot lesions and vascular disease in the lower extremities. The chapter on pregnancy and diabetes, although complete from an endocrinologic point of view, was unfortunately lacking in some of the details of the obstetric management of these patients.

Also unfortunate from a family practice perspective, some vital elements are missing from this text. A chapter on the management of the patient with diabetes mellitus from the primary care perspective is not provided. The Joslin Clinic has popularized the team approach, in which a large multidisciplinary team assesses each patient, provides education on treatment modalities, counsels when psychosocial issues are involved, and then monitors the patient through careful follow-up visits. Because of this team approach, the initial assessment of a patient with diabetes mellitus can take up to 3 days! Clearly, such an approach would not be appropriate for the family physician for whom the average outpatient visit lasts 12 minutes. Also, although some mention is made of encouraging patients to be more involved with their care, no mention is made of recent work on the patient-centered care approach or the voluminous literature on patient empowerment. Finally, although specific recommendations on prevention are made in many of the chapters on complications, no one chapter organizes all the many preventive recommendations into a single coherent care plan appropriate for patients who are cared for by family physicians. Given the growing emphasis on prevention in the patient with diabetes mellitus, particularly the recent work by many investigators who advocate screening and early detection of complications, this is a particularly glaring omission.

Family physicians will find Joslin’s Diabetes Mellitus to be a detailed, complete reference book on all aspects of the care of the patient with diabetes mellitus. In-depth discussions of the pathogenesis of all aspects of diabetes mellitus that include the most recent research from the fields of molecular biology and genetics will keep the scientists among us well satisfied. For the more practical, chapters on treatment and complications offer a wealth of well-researched and, most of the time, practical options for the patient with diabetes mellitus. Family physicians should feel confident in turning to this text for even the most obscure question arising from discussions of these patients. However, physicians searching for a practical, primary care-oriented approach to patients with diabetes mellitus and those searching for a way to integrate all the many preventive recommendations made for these patients will be sorely disappointed.

Mark B. Mengel, MD, MPH
The Family Practice Residency Program at Beverly (Mass) Hospital

ARCH FAM MED/VOL 3, JULY 1994

646