

Review: Case-based Medical Physiology
by
Christopher Bell, Cecil Kidd & Trefor Morgan

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This book is not a text in the traditional sense, but rather offers 19 case vignettes covering a number of cases across the body systems. Each starts with a short introduction to a clinical situation. Then follows a series of (usually) multiple-choice questions relevant to the scenario. The case then unfolds as more information is presented as a narrative; each addition is then followed by further relevant questions. After each set of questions, correct answers are provided with short helpful commentaries on the reasons. A case review follows, highlighting the key issues which include not only the basic physiology or relevant anatomy, but also considerations of prevalence and major concerns for the affected patients. Key points are then highlighted, to emphasise the major issues and a reading list is included, encouraging students to explore further basic and clinical issues.

The 19 problems have intriguing titles and they range across a number of physiological and medical problems. Most of the major body systems are included, but the authors specifically do not aim to present a comprehensive coverage or review of all of medical physiology. Nor is it designed to provide extensive explanations of the basic and clinical topics introduced. It thus complements existing formal textbooks or on-line resources, and would encourage students in the health sciences to review and apply their understanding of the underlying physiology and basic anatomy of a number of common clinical situations. The progressive nature of the narratives and the well-placed questions should encourage students to develop a systematic approach to understanding basic mechanisms in health and disease. It would make an excellent guide for independent group discussion and study.

The problem-based structure would particularly complement that mode of learning, but for students in more conventional programs it offers a clinical context for basic physiological understanding. It would be particularly useful for students revising for examinations, but it goes well beyond the simple “cribs” for memorising answers to multiple-choice examinations by setting a brief context and providing clear explanations of mechanisms. The overall structure encourages systematic approaches and supports critical thinking.

The book is attractively produced, in a consistent format. Illustrations are used to good effect, including line

drawings, graphs, medical images including X-rays, clinical data and diagrams. The overall presentation encourages the reader to engage with each of the cases and to explore the underlying mechanisms. Its overall presentation and the sense of narrative attracts, challenges and stimulates the reader.

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