

BOOK REVIEWS

Abdominal Stomas and Their Skin Disorders, ed. by Calum C. Lyon and Amanda J. Smith. 2000. ISBN 1-85317-896-9. Price £39.95. Martin Dunitz. Hardcover. 232 pages, 291 figs.

This handbook is edited by two authors with long experience treating patients with multidisciplinary problems of the peristomal skin. Dr Lyon is a Specialist Registrar in Dermatology and Ms Smith is a stoma care specialist. Six other authors experienced in the fields of surgery, urology and dermatology from the Salford Royal Hospital NHS Trust and the University of Manchester, UK, contribute to the book. The six chapters run under the titles: 1. Intestinal and urological stomas: surgical aspects; 2. Stoma appliances and the specialist nurse; 3. Dermatitis; 4. Infections; 5. Pre-existing and coincident skin disease; and 6. Problems related to primary bowel pathology.

Lucid and informative, this book is beautifully, sometimes almost redundantly, illustrated, so much so that at times the "reading text" becomes disjointed by too many pictures of similar conditions. As a whole, however, this part of the book is a longed for contribution towards increasing our knowledge and understanding of the problems of "stoma patients". There is also much practical advice here on how to handle investigational and therapeutic problems.

Each chapter ends with an excellent summary table of "key messages", and five appendices complete the main part of the book: 1. Glossary, 2. Stoma appliance terminology, 3. Skin physiology and response to injury, 4. Topical corticosteroid treatments for peristomal rashes, and 5. Diagnostic flow chart. This part is useful as a reference book in clinical practice.

I warmly recommend this volume to dermatologists, general practitioners, stoma care nurses and surgeons.

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Systematic Review of Treatments for Atopic Eczema, by Colette Hoare, Alain Li Wan Po and Hywel Williams. ISSN 1366-5278. Queen's Printer and Controller of HMSO. 2000. Paperback. Summaries or full versions of this monograph can be downloaded from the web at <http://www.ncchta.org>. 52 pounds sterling per copy is required from private companies and those outside the UK. You can fax (+44 (0) 23 8059 5639) or e-mail. hta@soton.ac.uk marked for the attention of Ms. Melanie Corris, monograph editorial manager.

The NHS R&D, National Coordinating Centre for Health Technology Assessment (NCCHTA) was set up in 1993 in the UK "to ensure that high-quality research information on the costs, effectiveness and broader impact of health technologies

is produced in the most efficient way for those who use, manage and provide care in the NHS" – (the National Health System of the UK).

In 1996, a programme on systematic review of treatments for atopic eczema was funded and the results are published as *Health Technology Assessment 2000; 4: 37*. The review is shocking reading for any doctor concerned with the treatment of children and adults with atopic eczema. The principle behind the review was to only include *Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs)* in which *two or more treatments in human beings* were compared, and where the *study was prospective*. These are modest demands. Of a total of 1165 possible RCTs, only 272 studies (barely 25%) could be used. The majority of studies had flaws in design or in the presentation of results, so preventing their inclusion in the review. This is not flattering for those of us investigating patients with atopic eczema.

The book contains a wealth of information. It is a *must* to have access to this review, so it should be on the shelf of any dermatological library – especially where dermatologists (or paediatricians and allergologists) are in training. Examples from the book can easily be used as motivation and stimulation for discussion of future research. For example, there is no RCT evidence for the use of emollients, antihistamines, short burst potent versus longer-term weaker topical steroids, twice-a-day versus once-daily topical steroids, hospital admission, wet-wrap bandages, oral azathioprine or prednisolone in atopic eczema, ... and the list goes on (table 38, p. 113). Actually, only four therapies have been documented to be efficacious: topical steroids, oral cyclosporine, UV light and psychological intervention (adult patients). And yet the review looked at 47 different intervention studies!

Our British colleagues, Colette Hoare, Alain Li Wan Po and Hywel C. Williams, are to be thanked and congratulated for compiling this solid and provocative review. They write about future research priorities (p. 119) and state: "Perhaps one of the most useful aspects of this scoping review is that it will serve as a generator of other more detailed specific systematic reviews".

Be that as it may, I earnestly suggest that any new study of treatments of atopic dermatitis should only be initiated after the investigators have carefully looked at this review. The book can prevent mistakes being made in design and planning, and it can, should and will motivate us to improve our research for the benefit of the many patients with atopic eczema. You simply cannot do without it.

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