

BOOK REVIEWS

***Textbook of Laser and Light Dermatology in the Asian Skin* by Yong-Kwang Tay and Yui-Chew Chan. ISBN 978-981-4338-86-8. 250 pages. Price: US \$150. Hackensack, NJ: World Scientific, 2011.**

Laser treatment has undergone dramatic development in recent years, with important new improvements being made. However, side-effects often appear in pigmented Asian skin. Consequently, it is important to address the subject of laser treatment in Asian and pigmented skin. Very few books have been written on this subject, and this text will be of great value to plastic surgeons, paediatricians, dermatologists, etc.

The book is written by a group of clinicians from Singapore, who are experts in the field. The contents include key theoretical chapters, such as “Laser and light-tissue interactions”, as well as covering important aspects of laser safety.

There are several chapters on different types of lasers, with a focus on pigmented skin. Separate sections on indications, patient selection, anaesthesia etc., are well-written, as are the sections on side-effects and complications. The book contains numerous illustrations. In the chapter dealing with carbon dioxide lasers the authors indicate how to treat melanocytic naevi, but this is considered to be a contraindication in the western world as it can give rise to pseudomelanomas, which are impossible to distinguish from malignant melanomas. The chapter on “Vascular lasers in the Asian skin” deals with one of the most common applications, i.e. port-wine stains. The book also gives very good hands-on tips. The parts on haemangiomas should perhaps also have included more modern treatments, such as propranolol.

Several chapters deal with resurfacing, photo-rejuvenation and other cosmetic indications. Treatment of pigmented skin is always in focus.

The last chapter concerns “Photodynamic therapy in the Asian skin”. This chapter comments on theoretical considerations and hands-on treatment. In Asian skin, post-treatment hyperpigmentation is more common than in Caucasian skin.

In conclusion, the book is very easy to read and contains both theoretical sections and practical tips for treatment. The focus of this text is on Asian pigmented skin. It is well worth reading and definitely has a place in the practitioner’s library.

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***Skin Cancer 909: A Textbook of Skin Cancer and its Mimics* by Jonathan L Rees. Online textbook: <http://skincancer909.com>. 2012.**

This open-access online textbook provides an extensive overview of the main types of benign and malignant tumours found in human skin. In general, this innovative online publication gives a concise and well-written introduction to the pathogenesis, diagnosis and treatment of skin tumors, complemented by a vast and descriptive selection of clinical images. Readers can test their acquired knowledge as they go along, thanks to the question and answer section at the end of each chapter. Although intended for medical students and doctors within other specialities than ours, I am sure dermatology residents and even many specialists will find the content useful. Since it is free and open-access, curious patients will also find it of interest.

In the first 4 chapters, Rees introduces the reader to the anatomy and biology of human skin, the effects of ultraviolet radiation, and the processes involved in skin carcinogenesis. Non-melanoma skin cancers and malignant melanomas are covered in chapters 5–7, including a rather detailed description of the recommended therapeutic approaches for these different lesions. The varied clinical presentations of these tumours are nicely demonstrated with a good number of clinical images, which are also quite representative. In chapter 8 the author describes the myriad of benign differential diagnoses that can be confused with skin cancer; each skin cancer mimic being illustrated with 1 or 2 images, which can be enlarged when clicked on. Finally, chapter 9 gives a short introduction to other malignant skin tumours that are sometimes encountered, including cutaneous lymphoma, Merkel cell carcinoma, dermatofibrosarcoma protuberans, Kaposi’s sarcoma, Paget’s disease or cutaneous metastases.

As a bonus, there is an extra chapter containing a gallery of more than 150 clinical images of the previously discussed diagnoses. This gallery provides a valuable visual resource for readers of the diversity of clinical presentations that we, as dermatologists, are used to seeing in our skin cancer patients. All images can be enlarged and are elegantly presented as small albums, which can be browsed with ease.

Finally, each section ends with a few questions related to the text one has just read. Readers can thus test their knowledge of the subject if they wish. At the end of the list of questions there is a link to a chapter in which all the questions and answers are displayed. An improvement could be made here if the link took the reader directly to the answer to the particular question they have just read. Instead, the link is to the full list of questions and answers, where one has to scroll down

to find the relevant answer. This could, of course, be changed easily since the publication is online and can be revised whenever the author wishes.

The presentation of the chapters and sections of the book is very neat, with a menu always present on the left of the screen. From here one can easily access the different chapters without having to consult an index as one does in a printed textbook. There is also a useful search function at the bottom of the menu if the reader is looking for a particular word or phrase that may be present in one or more chapters. Since the book is online, the reader can also click “Control+F” (PC) or “Command+F” (Mac) at any time to search for particular words or phrases within the chapter that is currently displayed in the web browser.

By and large I was very pleased with the format and content of this book. I would perhaps have liked to see the text backed up by references, but nevertheless I found the information to be based on our current knowledge about skin cancer. As a big fan of all modern technology, this online and interactive presentation deserves full commendation. I can highly recommend it to all physicians interested in dermatology, residents learning about the diagnosis and treatment of skin cancer, and even to experts for use in teaching (after agreement with the author), or as a source of inspiration for their younger peers.

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© 2012 The Authors. doi: 10.2340/00015555-1394

Diagnostic and Prognostic Biomarkers and Therapeutic Targets in Melanoma by Michael J Murphy, editor. Series Editor: Antonio Giordano, ‘Current clinical pathology’, Humana Press, New York, 2012. ISBN 978-1-60761-432-6

Things were not supposed to turn out this way – or so we were told. The WWW was going to disrupt the publishing business. No longer would we need to pay €140 for the pleasure of reading a mixed bag of reviews on topics we were interested in (but not so interested in that we knew the primary literature well enough to obviate the need for others to précis it for us). Open access has arrived at this journal (*Acta Dermato-Venereologica*), and might just be at the tipping point generally, but each time I attend a dermatology meeting, the number of new textbooks and monographs seems

ever larger. It appears that the traditional financial model is not moribund yet. But what of the content?

This multi-authored volume comprises a series of 23 chapters devoted to technologies that are either already useful clinical tools or ones that might at some future time become useful. There are chapters on staging, pathology, epigenetic markers, microRNA biomarkers, serological markers, and many more, as well as chapters on diagnostic targets. There is a lot of information here. What is there not to like?

First, there is too much repetition, and not enough structure. The editorial scalpel should have been wielded more freely and with wider margins. How many times do we have to be told the same basic things: melanoma is aggressive, the incidence is increasing, melanocytes are derived from the neural crest etc. Second, any meaningful analysis of prognosis and biomarkers requires a quantitative treatment, and many of the chapters in the current volume are wanting in this regard. So, to take staging as an example, what we really want to read are mature clinico-statistical insights into how good the various prognostic factors are. We do not just want to know that a factor has a ‘significant’ effect on outcome; we want to know how large that effect is, and the precision of that estimate for individual patients. A significant Kaplan-Meier plot or an odds ratio are starting points, not clinical end points. American Joint Committee on Cancer summaries are not written on tablets of stone: how much variance does adding in mitotic rate account for? Is it robust, or does it depend on whether the tumour is at a friction or pressure site, and how reliable is it between pathologists and laboratories? It is not credible to deal with such topics without significant biostatistical insight. Third, the tone of much of the writing is what I call ‘grant writing mode’ – that is reality distortion mode. Anything positive is talked up and problems glossed over or not sought for, the assumption being that if we just continue along this particular path we will learn how to cure melanoma. Well perhaps, but perhaps not.

So, is this book worth buying? Yes. If you are a young clinical or research fellow starting out on the study of melanoma, your clinic or lab should get hold of a copy for you to read and reread from time to time. Be cautious however: there are other very similar monographs out there, with some overlap with the current volume. Finally, the volume demonstrates to me at least, that the amount of added value publishers bring to the scholarly enterprise is not as great as many hold dear. If the value was greater, who knows, people might pay even more.

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