

John Murtagh's General Practice Companion Handbook

John Murtagh

*4th edn, xxxviii + 441 pp, paperback (plastic cover) with illustrations, ISBN13: 978-007013628-1, Sydney, McGraw Hill, RRP: AUD150, 2007 (Reprinted 2008).

Reviewed by Peter A Leggat MD

In 2006-2007, the Australian Government estimated there were 25,564 general practitioners (GPs) in the country.¹ There would be few GPs who did not have a textbook by John Murtagh in the bookcase of their practice. For those GPs wanting a portable ready reference, then the fourth edition of the *John Murtagh's General Practice Companion Handbook* is a "must-have" manual. First published in 1996, the fourth edition of *John Murtagh's General Practice Companion Handbook* contains a Preface, About the author, Laboratory reference values, Normal values-diagnostic guidelines, a list of Abbreviations, a table of Contents, and an A-Z of general practice conditions listed alphabetically. There is no index as the table of Contents is a comprehensive alphabetical listing of all the conditions discussed. There is also no bibliography nor a glossary. The handbook is presented with a durable plastic cover printed in full colour as an 18 x 11.5 cm manual, which would easily fit into the clinical/suit coat pocket or briefcase/handbag.

The backcover suggests that the handbook is targeted to the "medical student or an experienced professional, a rural or urban practitioner, a clinician or researcher". *John Murtagh's General Practice Companion Handbook* appears to be primarily aimed at general practitioners or registrars in general practice. It would also be useful if provided to students undertaking courses in general practice as an adjunct to standard major reference textbooks in general practice and clinical medicine. The concise A-Z style means the handbook is consistent in presentation and easy to read. The conditions discussed are highlighted at the top of the page, which helps the reader find the condition for which they are looking. The incorporation of extensive boxes, tables and figures is helpful. There are however no colour plates of "spot" diagnoses, which is a pity. There is also a missed opportunity to put information on the major general practice emergencies on the inside front and back covers, which might be useful to consider in a future edition.

John Murtagh's General Practice Companion Handbook literally runs A-Z from Abdominal pain to Zoonoses. It targets the more common general practice conditions

and is fairly comprehensive in this field. Readers should not expect to find detailed information on the more exotic conditions, such as emerging infectious diseases or many of the travel-related diseases such as malaria. None-the-less, the handbook does contain an integrated section on 'Travel medicine and tropical infections', which provides a useful overview of some of the travel-related illnesses and some of the more notable tropical diseases such as melioidosis. Some readers may feel the need to consult a dedicated handbook of travel or tropical medicine.^{2,3} The manual is probably also largely limited to the Australian audience, but possibly could be utilised in New Zealand.

Professor John Murtagh, AM, MD, BSc, BEd, FRACGP, DipObstRCOG, is Professor in General Practice at Monash University, Melbourne, Australia. He also holds related positions at the University of Melbourne and the University of Notre Dame in Perth, as well as being a GP at the East Bentleigh Medical Group. Professor Murtagh is considered to be one of the elder statespersons of general practice in Australia. He publishes frequently in the medical literature, as well as contributing to his suite of textbooks, a number of which have been recognised internationally, including *Practice Tips*.⁴

The production of the fourth edition of the *John Murtagh's General Practice Companion Handbook* is a credible effort. It is now an established and a worthy member of textbooks dedicated to general practice. The cost is not prohibitive and it has little competition in the field of general practice.

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