

Essential Public Health: Theory and Practice*

Edited by Stephen Gillan, Jan Yates and Padmanabhan Badrinath

**1st edn. xiii +335 pp, paperback with illustrations and CD, ISBN 978-0-521-68983-0. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, RRP AUD97.00, 2007.*

Public health has done more than any other discipline to address global health issues and improve the standard of living and life expectancy, especially during the past 100 years. Today, we are fine tuning public health in many developed countries and most health professional courses now include a substantial component of public health training. At the postgraduate level, there are more than 20 postgraduate public health programs in Australasia alone, including those offered through the Centre for Military and Veterans' Health¹. It is important therefore that a concise textbook is available that addresses the contemporary issues in public health. A new textbook, *Essential Public Health: Theory and Practice* is an important addition to the suite of textbooks available in public health. Not to be confused with *Essential Public Health Medicine*, last published in 1993,² or the more recently published *Essentials of Public Health*,³ *Essential Public Health* is ideally placed to be added to booklists of undergraduate and introductory postgraduate public health courses. It has a table of Contents, List of contributors, a Foreword by Professor John Danesh from the University of Cambridge, a second Foreword by Tony Jewell - Wales' Chief Health Officer, Acknowledgements, an Introduction, two main Parts, 17 Chapters, an epilogue, a Glossary and a comprehensive Index.

Essential Public Health is presented as an 18.5 x 24.5 x 1.5 cm paperback publication, which could easily fit in the briefcase or student's backpack. The textbook has a simple but attractive coloured cover. The back cover gives brief details of the book and of the editors. The stated primary aim of the textbook is "to capture both the art and science in the field". The stated target audience is "all those training in health care, social care and related disciplines such as environmental health". However, the book will appeal to all academic staff who co-ordinate and teach public health and related programs, as well as students, who are undertaking undergraduate courses in public health and/or introductory postgraduate public health courses. The textbook comes with a CD.

The two main Parts of *Essential Public Health* include "Part 1 The public health toolkit" and "Part 2 The challenges of public health in practice". The chapters in Part 1, written by the textbook's editors, include: 1. Demography; 2. Epidemiology; 3. Evidence-based health care; 4. Improving population health; 5. Screening; 6. Health needs assessment; 7. The health status of the population; 8. Health care evaluation; 9. Decision-making in health care; and 10. Health protection and communicable disease control. The chapters in Part 2, all written by external contributors, include 11. The health of children and young people; 12. Adult public health; 13. Public health and aging; 14. Tackling health inequalities; 15. Health policy; 16. Quality measurement and improvement in health care; and 17. International development and public health. The conclusion, entitled "Public Health - the future - be part of it", is written by David Pencheon. Each chapter has references, although no "further readings".

The two Parts of *Essential Public Health* are quite distinct. One recent review even suggested that *Essential Public Health* is really two books in one.⁴ Part 1 systematically describes important "tools" and principles of public health, which are core to the discipline. There is good use of tables and illustrations in this Part. Primarily, the CD complements this Part of the textbook, which has a number of self-directed learning questions associated with it. Health promotion, although not a named chapter, is a major component of Chapter 4 Improving population health. Part 2 has well selected contributions from practitioners in the field, which are deemed "essential"; however there will be many topics missing. These chapters help to put the principles from Part 1 into practice. Much is made in the various chapters of "lobbying and working with key stakeholders. . .to resolve problems" (p495),⁵ as pointed out in another recent review. However, there is no dedicated discussion concerning public health advocacy, community empowerment or how partnerships, consultations and negotiations with key stakeholders are developed, including the general public.

Each of the editors is from the United Kingdom (UK). Stephen Gillam is Director of Undergraduate Public Health Teaching at the Institute of Public Health, University of Cambridge. Jan Yates is a Public Health Specialist with experience of public health practice in Primary Care Trusts, as well as acute hospital and mental health settings. Padmanabhan Badrinath is a Consultant in Public Health Medicine in the Suffolk Primary Care Trust. Of the 12 contributors, only one resides outside of the UK. It may be useful in future editions to have more contributors from other countries to further internationalise what is already a very useful textbook.

Essential Public Health is a useful introductory textbook in the field of public health and an ideal

undergraduate teaching resource. It is a compact two-in-one textbook, which covers both the principles and the practice of public health. This first Edition of *Essential Public Health: Theory and Practise* is a creditable effort and is sure to gain entry into the relatively competitive market of public health textbooks, especially with the University of Cambridge Press behind it.

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Fast Facts - Eczema and Contact Dermatitis

John Berth-Jones, Eunice Tan and Howard I Maibach*

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Eczema is a common condition affecting both adults and children. Atopic eczema affects more than one in ten children in developed countries, with an incidence that is increasing.¹ Adults are not spared, with eczematous diseases accounting for 94% of notifiable skin disease and ranked third among all notified occupational disease in one large Danish study.² Both childhood atopic dermatitis and contact dermatitis have a major impact on both patients and their families' quality of life.^{3,4} Confirmed diagnosis is associated with an improved quality of life for contact dermatitis.⁴ The Australian Bureau of Statistics also lists the most common reasons for using skin ointments or creams as eczema and/or dermatitis (22%).⁵ Of note for military personnel is that a history

of atopic dermatitis is described as a contraindication to smallpox vaccination.⁶

Most health personnel will encounter eczema in daily practice and correct and early diagnosis along with appropriate management is obviously important. Help with this is at hand thanks to this text.

Fast facts – Eczema and Contact Dermatitis is presented as a 94 page A5 publication that would fit easily into the briefcase or carry bag. The small footprint would make it equally valuable as an easy to access desktop reference and would also fit easily in the pockets of the rapidly disappearing but once ubiquitous white coats of hospital based medical staff. It contains a table of contents, introduction, eight

sections, sources of further information and an index. There is no forward although this is not surprising given the concise nature of the text.

The text itself is intended to help familiarise “the non dermatologist reader with the aetiology, diagnosis and treatment of the various forms of this disease”. The target audience is described as “physicians in many different medical disciplines”, as well as primary care physicians and other healthcare professionals. This could include medical and nursing students, pharmacists, allied health staff and even the informed family member or patient.

The introduction is worth reading as a guide to definitions and classification of the disease. The subsequent sections include “1 – Allergy and contact dermatitis”, “2 – Irritant contact dermatitis”, “3 – Atopic eczema”, “4 – Photosensitive eczema”, “5 – Seborrheic eczema”, “6 – Hand and foot eczema”, “7 – Other forms of eczema” and “8 – Future trends”. Most sections follow a standard format consisting of epidemiology, pathophysiology, clinical presentation, diagnosis, treatment, patient education, complications, prognosis, key points and key references. The sections are also colour coded enabling ease of access, which is important in a desk top ‘fast facts’ text.

The book is easy to read and clearly set out. Particular strengths are the ‘Key Points’ sections at the end of each section and the quality of the illustrations. The adage that ‘a picture tells a thousand words’ is never more so than in dermatology. The quality of image reproduction is very good for a pocket guide and each has been carefully selected to clearly demonstrate specific aspects of the disease. Additionally the diagrams illustrating body distribution of different types of eczema are a valuable reference and particularly suited to a fast facts style presentation. The reproduced diagram guiding application of the correct amount of topical steroid is especially useful and would be a valuable tool for patients or carers. This diagram is representative of the books approach to management advice which is practical and clearly

stated. The inclusion of patient education is also a valuable and important resource. As both an Emergency Physician and the parent of a child with severe eczema, personal experience is that this is an important and often neglected area in many texts.

Brief details of the three authors are provided at the start of the book. John Berth-Jones is a Consultant Dermatologist at United Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust, Coventry, UK. Eunice Tan is a Specialist Registrar in Dermatology at Norfolk and Norwich University Hospitals, Norwich, UK.

Howard I Maibach is a Professor of Dermatology at the University of California, San Francisco, USA.

The background of the authors is reflected in the book and creates some limitations particularly for Australasian readers. Sources of further information are limited to Europe, UK and USA associations for eczema and dermatology. Similarly the text uses the British National Formulary so there are likely to be some variations in practice and availability. A minor point is that although the stated intention of the authors is to use an evidence based approach whenable this is not clearly referenced. Key references are supplied at the end of each section but not directly linked to statements nor are levels of evidence supplied.

These issues aside this is an excellent text and one that is highly recommended. A minor but important point of note in today’s society is that the text is printed in vegetable ink and on biodegradable paper. The copy reviewed was provided by CSL Biotherapies as a service to medicine. The same can be said of the author’s contribution – well done.

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