

## Medicine in Africa

**Principles of Medicine in Africa**, edited by Eldryd Parry, Richard Godfrey, David Mabey, and Geoffrey Gull, 3rd ed, 1442 pp, with illus, \$200, ISBN 0-521-80616-X, New York, NY, Cambridge University Press, 2004

AT FIRST GLANCE, THIS BOOK LOOKS VERY comprehensive and perhaps intimidating in size. On closer scrutiny, it is extremely student friendly in view of the meticulous and systematic organization of the contents into four parts. The clarity of presentation and language flow are praiseworthy. The arrangement of the book greatly enhances quick reference to any relevant section, even for the uninitiated.

Highly readable and well-edited, the textbook covers all aspects of diseases in the tropics. The revised edition combines classical aspects of internal medicine with a rich understanding of the major influences on health and disease in Africa. The main focuses are on health and diseases in Africa generally, communicable and noncommunicable diseases, systemic diseases, and common life-threatening emergencies seen in the continent.

The first part of the book on health and diseases provides a lucid and concise account of the effects of poverty, poor environmental conditions, and internal crises on disease patterns in Africa. Particularly of note is the impact of nutrition-related illnesses associated with these factors. The text offers various solutions for how health services in Africa could be managed within the limited available resources.

Part 2 provides comprehensive coverage of the communicable diseases prevalent in Africa. The various reasons why individuals develop infection are clearly highlighted. A thorough

analysis of each communicable disease is carried out, and an attempt is made to explain pathogenesis and treatment. The general concept of control and prevention of communicable diseases receives prominent focus. This section ends with more than 50 chapters on the common bacterial, fungal, and viral infections seen in the tropics. Detailed discussions are accompanied by material emphasizing epidemiology, treatment, and prevention.

In part 3 the growing importance of noncommunicable diseases in Africa, such as diabetes, asthma, and hypertension, is discussed, and factors responsible for their emergence as serious health threats in Africa are clearly highlighted. These chapters are followed by useful suggestions on how to prevent this dangerous trend. The various economic indices of African countries are reviewed to evaluate how socioeconomic conditions determine health and disease patterns. However, the authors fail to elucidate the difficulties faced in the long-term management of these noncommunicable diseases in Africa, apparently as a result of the depletion of the lean economic resources available to the patient.

In part 4, effort is made to review diseases of body systems, with focus on their manifestations in the African populace. Unfortunately, authors do not give detailed discussions of the conditions. Exceptions are conditions prevalent in Africa, such as sickle cell disease and anemia, which are discussed extensively.

Part 5 presents "Medical Aspects of Other Important Conditions in Africa." Pregnancy-related diseases receive emphasis, as Africans still have a high maternal mortality rate. Common psychiatric diseases, substance abuse problems, disability, and malignancies receive thorough review. The various diseases of the skin and eye in Africa are emphasized. Management difficulties of these conditions in Africa owing to absence of sophisticated facilities are highlighted.

The book ends with a section on the management of life-threatening emer-

gencies. The authors elucidate management techniques and problems but do not provide great detail on management techniques or on pathophysiology.

The textbook is well referenced and has beautiful color photographs and illustrations, which add the clarity to the text. The chapters, which cover most of the diseases prevalent in Africa, are excellent. The pattern of discussion is extremely practical to such an extent that a reader who has never been to Africa can nonetheless feel the full impact of the African health scenario.

Compared with similar textbooks on tropical medicine, *Principles of Medicine in Africa* stands out from the rest, as the presentation is lucid and technically sound. It is therefore highly recommended as a reference textbook on all aspects of tropical medicine and other medical issues in Africa. Parry and his formidable international team have put together an up-to-date masterpiece, not only for students at all levels in Africa, but for the entire tropical world. *Principles of Medicine in Africa* deserves a place on the shelves of all serious minded people who have anything to do with medicine as a whole.

Etete J. Peters, MB, FWACP  
University of Calabar Teaching Hospital  
Calabar, Nigeria  
etetepeters@yahoo.com