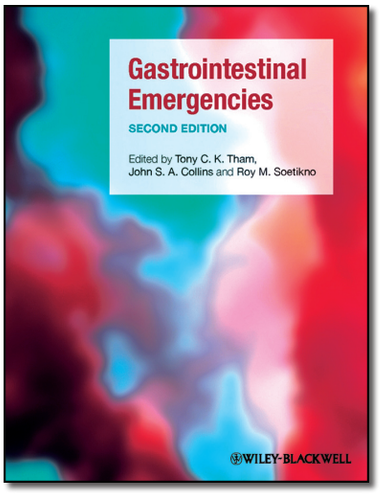
Book Review

Gastrointestinal Emergencies

Tony C.K. Tham, John S.A. Collins and Roy M. Soetikno (eds)

(2nd edition, 2009, Wiley Blackwell)

A Claridge & D Lloyd



Gastrointestinal Emergencies describes itself as "the definitive reference guide for the management of gastrointestinal emergencies and endoscopic complications", The book covers the huge topic of acute gastroenterology in a succinct and easy to read format. At just over 200 pages it covers a lot more than what you might expect and makes for easy and enjoyable reading.

The book is split into three sections. Section 1, "Approach to Specific Presentations", gives a short 40 page overview of 7 different presenting symptoms. Generally these introductory chapters are easy to follow and easy to read. The individual chapters are short and although not a definitive reference guide, include handy and very extensive lists of less common causes of the specific presentations. More experienced readers may find these introductory chapters rather too basic and there is considerable incongruity between the level at which these chapters are pitched and the more specialist discussions of later chapters.

Section 2, "Complications of Gastrointestinal Procedures", is a little longer at 46 pages. As the title suggests, this section explains diagnosis, investigation and management of all of the common and many of the less common problems and complications associated with endoscopic procedures. This section is well written, clear and concise, and would be of particular value to endoscopy trainees.

Section 3, "Specific Conditions", fills the remaining pages and provides a more in-depth review of the subjects one would expect in this type of book, such as acute liver failure and acute variceal and non-variceal bleeding. These chapters present up to date and detailed information aimed primarily at trainees involved in the inpatient management of such conditions. Most of these chapters, and particularly those on alcoholic hepatitis and acute severe ulcerative colitis, are well written and easy to assimilate. In general, the information provided is at a similar level to many larger textbooks although not as detailed as more focused journal reviews.

When it comes to presentation, the book is slightly disappointing. Within the colourful hardback cover it is entirely presented in black and white except for 18 colour plates between Section 1 and Section 2. Although referenced in the text, the images would probably have been better placed within the text rather than separately.

Overall Gastrointestinal Emergencies provides a succinct overview of endoscopic and acute GI problems. It falls short of being "the definitive reference guide" but appropriately so, as only the largest and cumbersome of text books would be able to fulfill such a claim whilst covering such a diverse subject. Its approach to presentation, diagnosis, investigation and management are generally acceptable and make for a good revision tool or simple reference. At a more advanced level the book will not challenge larger texts, the internet or specialist journals. However, Gastrointestinal Emergencies would provide a useful guide to Core and Acute Medicine trainees of any level, in addition to more junior Gastroenterology trainees.

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