



Alternative Therapies for Cancer and Arthritis

Earl Weisenburger and Irvin Boichuk. 144 pp. Oolichan Books, PO Box 10, Lantzville BC V0R 2H0. 1996. \$14.95. ISBN 0-88982-154-2

Overall rating: Good
Strengths: Brief, affordable and easy-to-read overview
Weaknesses: Some references and inventory of arthritis remedies incomplete; some statements not referenced
Audience: Interesting and useful for health care professionals; easily understood by patients and the public

Because patients are increasingly turning to alternative therapies, physicians need an understanding of the purported benefits and risks of these therapies. This small paperback provides an introduction to a range of alternative therapies for cancer, with a few references to folk remedies for arthritis. The authors have arranged alternative treatment methods into chemical, dietary, herbal and miscellaneous therapies as well as therapies provided at single-site clinics. They promise to present the information in a nonjudgemental fashion. For each treatment they outline the claims for and against it. In most instances, the claims for the treatment consist of anecdotes and improbable explanations of mechanisms. The claims against the treatment consist of a mixture of results of scientifically rigorous studies, anecdotes and opinions. This book can be easily understood by readers with no medical background, as the authors intended.

In some respects, the book is more entertaining than informative. For example, several of the described alternative therapies are no longer available, and most of the references are more than 10 years old. In fact,

the lack of complete and accurate references is a hindrance to readers who wish to review the evidence for and against alternative therapies in more detail. Many statements are unreferenced, and some references are incomplete or incorrect. The authors have made no attempt to assess the scientific rigour of the evidence critically. Material from newspaper articles and obscure, non-peer-reviewed sources is presented in much the same way as articles from the most prestigious peer-reviewed medical and science journals.

In a few instances, the authors express unsupported opinions. For example, in discussing religious cures originating in China or India, the authors state that "there are many safe and effective natural remedies prescribed by these religious followings," without examples or references. I would have liked to have seen more information on folk remedies for arthritis. The common use of copper bracelets and devil's claw were each accorded only a single sentence. The outbreak of serious toxicity caused by an impurity in the dietary supplement L-tryptophan was accorded only two unreferenced sentences, whereas the medical literature contains more than 100 articles on the outbreak.

Despite these shortcomings, this book is an affordable, easy-to-read introduction to alternative therapies. It provides physicians and patients with an overview of the amazing range of alternative therapies for which there is little or no scientifically rigorous information on safety or efficacy.

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ABC of Major Trauma

2nd ed. Edited by David Skinner, Peter Driscoll and Richard Earlam. 146 pp. Illust. BMJ Publishing Group, London. 1996. Distributed in Canada by the Canadian Medical Association, Ottawa. \$51.95 (\$42.95 CMA members). ISBN 0-7279-0917-7

Overall rating: Excellent
Strengths: Concise text with many diagrams and tables; emphasis on teaching points
Weaknesses: Tries to cover too much material; section on medical problems appears out of place
Audience: Emergency physicians and nurses, and residents in surgery and emergency medicine

The target audience for this book is emergency nurses and physicians as well as surgical residents and any health care personnel who care for patients with trauma in rural areas or who transport these patients to a trauma centre. The editors are consultants in accident and emergency medicine as well as general surgery.

The text follows the format of the advanced trauma life support course, with the addition of graphs, illustrations and tables to emphasize the concepts. All of the graphs, tables and photos are in colour; the photos are therefore very life-like.

There is an excellent section on preparing to treat patients with trauma as well as on the composition, roles and responsibilities of the trauma team. There is also an excellent chapter on radiography in the diagnosis of trauma, which outlines the indications for particular radiographs, their quality and interpretation.

There are separate chapters on pediatric trauma, trauma in elderly people and trauma in pregnancy. These chapters emphasize relevant clinical points that illustrate how the care of these patients may differ from that of other patients with trauma.