



Book Review AMJ 2011 4, 7

Essential Drugs Practical Guidelines 2010 Edition Medecins Sans Frontiers

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Essential drugs (medicines) are considered a revolution in public health based on the premise that a limited number of drugs (medicines) for common disease conditions can meet the majority of health needs of the population. Essential drugs have been widely used all over the world and have significant advantages for patients, health professionals, health administrators and the country.

Medecins Sans Frontiers (MSF) (www.msf.org) is an organisation which works to deliver healthcare throughout the world especially in deprived regions and regions hit by conflict. MSF has produced a number of books related to medicines and this book is intended for doctors, nurses, pharmacists and medical auxiliary personnel. The book provides concise, practical information about medicines to health professionals and is based on the field experience of MSF. The medicines (drugs) have been classified both according to the route of administration and alphabetically. The book is similar to a formulary and information can be found in two ways: a summary at the beginning which lists chapters and their page numbers, and an alphabetical index at the end which lists drugs by international non-proprietary names (INN) and proprietary names.

Drugs have been arranged as oral drugs, injectable drugs, infusion solutions, vaccines and related drugs and drugs for external use. The second part of the book deals with organisation of a pharmacy, drug quality and storage,

prescription, cost and compliance, use of antibiotics and antiseptics and disinfectants. The book also contains the World Health Organization (WHO) model list of essential medicines and main references.

The description of each drug is concise and precise. Important trade names are also mentioned. Therapeutic action, indications, presentation, dosage, duration, contraindications, adverse effects and precautions and remarks are the main subsections. We found the remarks useful and very practical. The storage information would be very useful as doctors are often not aware about this information. Having been involved with the hospital pharmacy and the medicine and therapeutics committee in our institution we were highly impressed by the schema of layouts of a hospital pharmacy. The simplified description of running a pharmacy is also useful. Being involved with rational use of medicines for a long time we found the chapter on prescription, cost and compliance interesting. Limiting the number of injectables has been widely recommended. Pharmacist colleagues had informed us about the high cost of syrups and oral suspensions and the book gives definite reasons for not preferring liquids. These are variability of dose, and higher cost of liquid preparations. The use of placebos and non-essential medicines should be restricted. The choice of antibacterials for common infections and a summary of important antibiotics are of importance.

The book will be of use to doctors, pharmacists and nurses as a formulary and ready reference. In developing countries formularies are not easily available and the book can be freely downloaded from the MSF website (http://www.refbooks.msf.org/MSF_Docs/En/Essential_drugs/ED_en.pdf). We downloaded our copy through



HINARI (<http://hinari-gw.who.int/>) and the hyperlink leading to the site of Free Books for Doctors (www.freebooks4doctors.com/).

We would have liked the authors to use the term 'medicines' instead of 'drugs' in consonance with latest trends. The book would be a useful bedside reference for health professionals and can also be used to set up and run a pharmacy. MSF and the authors should be congratulated on this venture.
