



Book Review

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Nepalese National Formulary: Second Edition.

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A formulary is a book containing information about medicines targeted at the treating physician. A formulary is a handy and portable drug reference which the doctor can use at the bedside, in clinics and other locations to ensure rational use of medicines. A formulary should be of an appropriate size to fit into the coat pocket of the doctor and should be robust enough to withstand frequent handling.

Formularies have been produced by many hospitals and national bodies. Among the well-known formularies are the British National Formulary (BNF) and the World Health Organization (WHO) Model Formulary. In Nepal, Patan Hospital publishes and regularly updates its formulary which we have adapted for use in our hospital. At a national level the first edition of the Nepalese National Formulary (NNF) was published in 1997. The formulary was well produced and we use it to teach our students about use of medicines and as a quick reference in the medicine information centre. Recently in 2010 the NNF was updated and a second edition published taking into consideration the large number of new drugs registered in Nepal in the intervening 14-year period.

The book starts with guidelines on rational prescribing which cover a number of important issues including drugs to be avoided or to be used with caution in liver disease, renal disease, pregnancy and lactation. The book is divided into chapters dealing with drugs acting on a particular organ system. Information about various drugs is presented in a simple and concise manner. The authors could also have provided information about the different brands of a particular generic medicine available in the Nepalese market with their costs. This is a difficult task due to the large number of brands in the market and a lack of objective evidence for cost-effectiveness. I feel that this is an important issue to ensure rational use of medicines in the country which has to be tackled sooner or later. Newer medicines are covered but head-to-head comparisons with older medicines are missing. This, again, is an important area as companies strongly promote newer, more expensive medicines.

Also colour coding and use of different colours for drugs acting on different organ systems would make the book easier to use. The appendix has a very useful section on drug interactions with the drugs arranged alphabetically by generic name. There is also the final draft of the fourth revision of the national list of essential medicines. The book ends with a comprehensive index. The formulary and the essential medicines list should be used in the education of all healthcare students in the country and should form the basis for refresher training about drugs for health professionals. The national drug regulatory authority, the Department of Drug Administration (DDA) should ensure the formulary is made widely available to all health students and healthcare professionals. The second edition should also be made available on the DDA's website (www.dda.gov.np). The size is handy but the binding may need to be strengthened to withstand frequent handling. The layout should be improved to make it more user friendly and facilitate quicker information retrieval.

Hopefully the next revised printed edition of the NNF will be published more quickly. The authors have invited comments from readers which could be incorporated into the internet editions of the book. I am aware of the difficulties in creating and providing independent sources of drug information in developing nations. It is a difficult and often thankless task. The authors should be congratulated on successfully revising and updating the formulary which will also be of interest to readers in other developing countries.
