

BOOK REVIEW: GUIDE TO GOOD PRESCRIBING

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Irrational use of medicines is a common problem all over the world. Bad prescribing habits of doctors and other prescribers could be one of the factors responsible. Bad prescribing habits lead to ineffective and unsafe treatment, prolongation of illness, distress and harm to the patient and higher costs.

It is important for all medical students to learn good prescribing habits are to be learned by all medical students. Problem-based learning of pharmacology and therapeutics is important to learn proper prescribing skills. The 'Guide to good prescribing' is a kind of user manual to help undergraduate students pick up prescribing skills.

The book is divided into four parts and has four annexes. The book starts by explaining why the reader should read the book. The first part gives an overview and chapter 1 deals with the process of rational treatment. The concept of a personal or P-drug is introduced. The six step process of rational treatment is summarized.

The second part deals with the process of selecting your personal or P-drugs. The second chapter introduces the P-drug concept. The steps in choosing a P-drug are illustrated using the example of selecting a P-drug for angina pectoris. The four basic criteria of efficacy, safety, cost and convenience for selecting a P-drug are emphasized.

Chapter 4 deals with the guidelines for selecting P-drugs. Text boxes are a characteristic feature of the book. In this particular chapter, the boxes deal with the criteria for the selection of essential drugs; efficacy, safety and cost and the general characteristics of dosage forms.

The third part deals with treating your patients. The first step of defining the patient's problem is clarified using examples. The second step is to specify the therapeutic objective or what you want to achieve with the treatment. The patient examples are again very helpful. Verifying the suitability of your selected P-drug is at the heart of individualizing treatment for a particular patient. The three sub steps of this process namely checking whether the active substance and dosage form are suitable, whether the dosage schedule is suitable and whether the duration is suitable has been well covered. The importance of pharmacokinetics for appropriate drug action and rational prescribing has been emphasized. The book is very helpful in translating pharmacological concepts from the abstract to the concrete and for using them in clinical practice.

Writing a prescription has been covered in chapter 9. The legal obligation to write legibly has been underlined. Examples of prescriptions have been given in the text. We especially liked the idea of giving handwritten prescriptions. The next chapter deals with giving information, instructions and warnings. This is often not properly carried out during the consultation process. The minimum information to be conveyed listed under six heading is very useful. These criteria are emphasized while conducting communication skills sessions in our department.

The creation of a personal formulary of medicines is a good exercise and has been carried out in medical schools in many countries. We have found this book to be very useful in teaching P-drug selection to our students.

The fourth part deals with keeping up-to-date. The various sources of information about drugs and choosing between different sources of information have been detailed. The small paragraph on efficient reading will be especially useful for students and practicing doctors.

Annex 1 deal with essential pharmacokinetics for a doctor. The set of essential references in annex 2 is useful. Annex 3 deals with how to explain the use of some dosage forms. Eye drops, eye ointments, ear drops, nasal drops, transdermal patches, nasal spray, aerosol, suppositories, vaginal tablets and vaginal creams are covered using simple diagrams. The department runs a medication counseling center in the teaching hospital and the diagrams and text are used to educate the pharmacists who will be counseling the patients. We also use it to educate our undergraduate students. The last annex deals with the vital issue of use of injections.

The book is very user friendly and each chapter has a summary. The book is well produced and is a delight to read. The book should be a part of the personal formulary of every medical student and teachers of pharmacology and other disciplines.

About the book:

De Vries TPGM, Henning RH, Hogerzeil HV, Fresle DA. Guide to good prescribing. A practical manual. WHO/DAP/94.11. Reprinted 2000.

Available at whqlibdoc.who.int/hq/1994/WHO_DAP_94.11.pdf,
www.med.uva.es/who/ggp/homepage.htm

The guide is also available at the WHO Medicines library and has been published in 16 languages.