

BOOK REVIEW

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“Paramedic field care: A complaint-based approach.”

Pons, P and Cason, D. (Chief Eds) Missouri: American College of Emergency Physicians; 1997. 872 pages, ISBN 0-8016-6361-X. RRP AU\$139.70

This text, published by the American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP), was written with the goal of preparing paramedic students for the realities of the prehospital setting. A culmination of years of work with over 75 contributors including paramedics, educators, emergency physicians, EMS administrators, nurses, and allied health professionals—many of who are internationally renowned—the text provides a comprehensive authoritative text for the novice paramedic student or practitioner. Structured in classic textbook style, the text consists of 58 chapters spread across 7 key-themed section areas. A key claim of this text is its unique presentation, referred to as ‘contextual learning’, that focuses on teaching patient care and treatment by using chief complaint, just as the patient actually presents.

The text methodically and systematically builds on the knowledge of the reader as it works through a comprehensive array of topics. Beginning with the basic principles of EMS care and foundation of practice, the text quickly moves into principles of pathophysiology, with little emphasis placed in anatomy and physiology other than at a basic level. The very basics of anatomy and physiology are covered and, although solid, may have a tendency to leave the student wanting to know more or needing to source other texts to fill in important areas that are not covered in this text. Clearly, an additional text that provides a greater depth of anatomy and physiology would be required, which is almost most certainly the case in most teaching, learning, and pedagogy in health. Of particular interest is an entire section, consisting of 12 chapters, devoted entirely to patient assessment. This is pleasing to see in a text, where traditionally, assessment, judgment, and decision-making have been problematic in teaching and pedagogy.

The text covers patient assessment extensively in a variety of settings. It is clear that this text uses hypothetico-deductive theory (a judgment and decision-making theory that places emphasis on the recognition of key explicit cues as markers to guide the decision of the individual) and the dominant underpinning pedagogy. This type of judgment theory is common, and is routinely used in the teaching of and learning by students and novices in the development of their clinical practice. Building on this, the text presents a series of ‘patient presentation’ sections, and examines how patients may appear in a variety of the more common conditions. In these later chapters, elements of pattern recognition clinical judgement (a type of judgment theory that experts commonly use) appear. Although not extending to a complete problem-based approach, the text covers an impressive array of topics for the paramedic student, novice practitioner, or basic life-support practitioner. In covering such a large array of topics, the text leaves some areas a little thin, such as altered mental status and situations when patients present with more than one problem or

condition. These areas are and have always been problematic areas in teaching and pedagogy. The book incorporates a number of innovative education ideas for the student and teacher, including Clinical Skills Sheets that describe in provide detailed step-by-step instruction on a wide range of basic, intermediate, and advanced clinical procedures.

Logically structured, the text is well designed and illustrated. The appendix, glossary, and index are all thorough, comprehensive, and well set out. Graphically, the text is easy to peruse, with good attention to detail with respect to suitable combinations of illustrations, textboxes, diagrams, and summaries. Each chapter and section is equipped with key learning objectives and provides the reader with a list of references to source additional information. Claims made by the authors and commentators of unique contextual learning, is well supported and justified. This text is an excellent resource that can assist novices to develop a comprehensive range of critical thinking and practical skills, and is suitable as a recommended or prescribed text to support their studies. It is also quite suitable for intermediate and even advanced practitioners for a resource of refresher reference, mentors, educators, trainers, and those making a transition to paramedic practice from the allied health professions. This text is an ideal standards useful resource to for everyone in EMS to have, whether in teaching or in practice.