Journal of Emergency Primary Health Care

An International eJournal of Prehospital Care Research, Education, Clinical Practice, Policy and Service Delivery

ISSN 1447-4999

BOOK REVIEW

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'Need to know: Meningitis'. Routh, Kristina (2004). London, Heinemann Library, Harcourt Education Ltd. 55 Pages, ISBN 0-431-18844-0.
RRP AUD\$37.50.

Article 990119

Keywords: *book review; meningitis; infectious diseases.*

Meningitis is one in a series of twelve *Need-to-know* topics published by Harcourt and provides a solid introduction to meningococcal infection and disease.

Meningitis provides a basic and simple understanding of the history of the disease, who is most at risk and why, causes and types of the disease (bacterial and viral), and how the disease is spread. The book uses case studies to illustrate the identification of meningitis, co-morbid conditions, and diagnostic patterns. Signs and symptoms are described in detail along with the progression and natural history of the disease with emphasis on the need for rapid identification, diagnosis, and intervention. Vaccination options (availability for types of meningitis and the development of future vaccines) are outlined along with strategies and treatments (e.g. prophylactic administration) for the prevention of the spread of the disease. Decreasing the risk of contracting the disease in easily implemented strategies for groups, families and individuals, for example personal hygiene strategies, pet handling, early identification of symptoms for prompt emergency treatment, and receiving the vaccinations currently available are simply addressed. Explanations of the expected actions and events on admission to hospital and what to expect after the illness are also addressed. The emotional effects as well as the psychological effects are highlighted and a section on living with the consequences of the disease gives the reader an understanding from a personal empathetic perspective.

The book is aesthetically pleasing, containing glossy pages, large print, and excellent colour photographs. There is an educational glossary of terms in simple language and a comprehensive contents page and index. An information and advice section directs readers to further resources in the USA, UK, New Zealand, and Australia. Contact numbers for meningitis associations are listed along with suggested further readings. Website addresses are also included for personal contact and access to further resources.

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As additional reference or reading material in medical practices, hospital maternity and medical wards, schools, day care centres, and community facilities (e.g. sporting clubs, neighborhood centres, and vaccination centres), the book greatly enhances the layperson's understanding of meningitis. *Meningitis* would be particularly useful to mothers, teachers, and carers of young children, and to individuals and community groups involved in the care of the aged.

This book is particularly useful for the families and sufferers of the disease as a follow-up resource offered by healthcare professionals. Used in conjunction with education and explanations of the disease, reference points for further questioning and discussions with healthcare professionals could be facilitated. The book, in its simplicity, is able to offer some reassurance to sufferers and families.

Meningitis is also a quick and easy read for healthcare professionals addressing the biological and psychological implications of the disease. Healthcare professionals are able to obtain basic knowledge on the disease to assist in them in supporting sufferers and families, particularly in circumstances when onset and progression of the disease is rapid.

Book available through Heinemann Interactive <http://www.hi.com.au/contact.htm>