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BOOK REVIEW

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'Mosby's EMT – Basic Textbook'

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Mosby JEMS 2nd Edition, 2005. 645 pages.

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Pre-hospital care is traditionally a field closely aligned with medical practice, and to date there has been a regrettably small proportion of educational works focusing specifically on this unique environment and the challenges it can present to an EMT or paramedic. Written by staff from the Emergency Medicine Program at the University of Pittsburgh, this text is designed to bridge the gap between traditional medical knowledge such as anatomy and physiology and the distinctive problems that arise only in the pre-hospital care environment.

The text is directed to those American students studying for the state or National Registry EMT-Basic exams, and closely follows the U.S Department of Transportation National Standard Curriculum (NSC) for the EMT – Basic course. Given its American focus, this text has portions which are not applicable to the Australian student, but its usefulness should not be underestimated for those people outside the USA determined to enter the pre-hospital care field as many facets of emergency care remain the same the world over.

Traditionally, pre-hospital care providers have been encouraged to take a "diagnostic" approach to their care – i.e.: attempt to diagnose the patient's condition and provide care based upon that diagnosis. This text is pleasing in that it favours the more practical "assessment" based approach, where the EMT or paramedic provides care based upon their assessment findings, regardless of diagnosis. In this way, a patient with breathing difficulties can quickly receive treatment such as oxygen without any of the delays that may eventuate as a cause for the breathing difficulty is sought.

The text is divided into eight main divisions, with specific chapters focusing on a comprehensive range of topics. This second edition has four extra chapters included that were absent in the first edition: Assisting the ALS Provider, Geriatrics, Tactical Emergency Medical Support, and First Responder Procedures with Weapons of Mass Destruction. Whilst these additional topics reflect our ever changing emergency environment, it is particularly satisfying to see the additional chapter on Geriatrics given the increasing demands in

the pre-hospital field of the aging population. The chapter is very relevant to the day-to-day operations of an emergency health care worker and addresses the specific needs of the elderly both in assessment techniques and treatment methods.

The text covers a wide variety of medical and trauma situations, but of particular relevance to the EMT student are the eight chapters in Division Three: Patient Assessment. Traditionally subjects such as sizing up a scene, obtaining a general impression of a patient and communications with both the patient and their family and the ambulance control room are taught by trial and error 'on the job'. The inclusion of chapters providing education on these situations will provide the student with a better expectation of the role of an EMT or paramedic and give a more realistic view of what this position entails.

Another important facet of pre-hospital care that is often overlooked within the education system is that of the emotional aspects of emergency care and how the work involved can have a stressful effect on the ambulance officer. This text devotes an entire chapter to the emotional well being of the EMT, and the inclusion of such an important but often underrated topic amply demonstrates the depth of this text and its comprehensive approach to pre-hospital care.

Each chapter of the text is set out in a logical and visually enhancing format, with a clear outline of the content followed by a scenario to demonstrate the lessons of the chapter. The authors make good use of information tables and boxes, and the inclusion of review questions and a summary at the end of each chapter enables the student to reinforce the information imparted throughout.

There is a comprehensive index and glossary included but of particular note is the atlas of trauma injuries photographs at the rear of the book. For any potential paramedic exposure to trauma pictures of a graphic nature is advantageous in order to prepare and de-sensitise for the first hand viewing of human injuries and the selection of photographs is commendable for their illustration of both signs that are not often seen or recognized and the more common trauma likely to be encountered.

The textbook comes with two notable additions – first, a CD-ROM accompanies the text and offers an easy and visually succinct tool to assist the student with understanding the skills encountered within the text. It features a video demonstration of all the skill sequences from the text and it provides an ideal option for out-of-classroom assistance with some of the more challenging tasks.

Second, a workbook to accompany the text offers a variety of question formats to help the student better understand and remember material from the text. This independent study tool provides the opportunity to self-test and allows the student to move at their own pace and pay particular attention to any weaknesses that are uncovered. Whilst the more experience practitioner would easily work through the initial questions, it is gratifying to see that more advanced questions are also included that would stretch even qualified personnel.

This text is an excellent resource to enable a student to prepare for the American EMT – Basic exams, and is comprehensive in its approach to pre-hospital care. It succeeds in demonstrating practical skills in addition to the more traditional theory, and incorporates a realistic view of what is expected from someone in the emergency field. Its appeal is not limited to American students, as there is much within the text that would be beneficial to intermediate and advanced practitioners in any country wishing to review and refresh their practice. Its systematic approach to assessment of a patient is commendable, and the inclusions such as the CD-ROM and the workbook mean that students can move through the book self-testing and refreshing as needed. The text is admirably thorough in addressing the fundamentals of pre-hospital care, and would be a beneficial addition to the library of anyone interested in this field.