

FEATURE: BOOK REVIEW

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Benson Chen is a fifth year medical student in Auckland, with an interest in the surgical specialties. He flirts with the idea of being a neurosurgeon, but is currently going through a neurology phase.



Hunt & Marshall's Clinical Problems in Surgery, 2nd Edition.

Julian A Smith, Jane G Fox, Alan C Saunder, Ming Kon Yi Elsevier
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RRP: NZ\$169.90

'It is more common to see an unusual presentation of a common disease than a rare disease.' Many medical students would have heard this before, yet when it comes to practicing clinical medicine we often forget that even common diseases can have unusual presentations. This is especially true in surgery where many common surgical problems masquerade as the unusual; where despite our best efforts the patient's presenting problems just don't seem to match a certain disease.

Hunt and Marshall's Clinical Problems in Surgery (2nd ed.) is not your ordinary textbook. Medical and surgical texts, such as the Oxford Handbook series, have traditionally been based around the diseases one may encounter in clinical practice, organised by anatomical region. Instead, Clinical Problems in Surgery discusses common clinical presentations encountered in surgical practice, how to solve these problems and how to devise a plan to manage them expeditiously and safely.

The beauty of this book is its focus on the practice of medicine using a problem oriented clinical approach rather than emphasising disease and pathology. "Patients present with clinical problems, not defined disorders". This approach is centred on the patient's presentation and the issues that are affecting this patient.

The introduction to the text teaches students how to use this approach, which involves: (1) Collecting and recording the Database (history and examination); (2) Constructing a problem list; (3) Assessment and plan; (4) Recording progress notes; and (5) Writing discharge summaries. Clinical students, especially those who are just starting on the wards, will find this section particularly relevant to all branches of medicine – not just surgery!

These titles are available from Elsevier Australia (www.elsevier.com.au) or your favourite university or medical bookshop.

Clinical Problems in Surgery covers a range of surgical problems over nine chapters grouped by region. The main presenting problems from each surgical specialty are covered including topics from general surgery, vascular surgery, orthopaedics, ENT head and neck, urology, cardiothoracic surgery, and neurosurgery. Topics from plastics, ophthalmology and gynaecology are also discussed – making this a comprehensive surgical text.

Each chapter begins with an introduction focusing on the important aspects of the history and examination relevant to that system. Every conceivable problem a patient can present with is then discussed in detail, beginning with a description of the problem and the most common causes. Each cause is then reviewed briefly and compared and contrasted with the others, and a diagnostic and treatment plan outlined. All the common surgical conditions that medical students are likely to encounter while on the wards are discussed.

The second edition of the book introduces four new chapters: Preoperative Medical Problems in Surgical Patients, Postoperative Problems, Problems in Surgical Intensive Care, and Problems in the Injured Patients. These chapters explore additional problems that one may have to manage. I found the new chapters on managing the pre-op and post-op patient to be very relevant and practical. As I am often reminded, surgeons don't want to spend time on the wards managing patients – this is the role of the House Officer!

Clinical Problems in Surgery is printed using a two-colour scheme (blue and black), nevertheless the text is easy to read, and accompanying diagrams and pictures simple and easy to understand (even if they are not in full colour). Despite the numerous authors involved in writing Clinical Problems in Surgery, there is very little difference in writing styles between chapters. Each chapter is succinctly written with the key points highlighted and emphasised. If I had to fault the book, it would be the layout of the text on the page, which is organised into long paragraphs. This however does not detract from the quality of the book, unless you like to learn from lists and bullet points.

Overall, students will find Clinical Problems in Surgery to be a useful companion while they are on their surgical runs. The book's simplicity and step-by-step approach to every possible presenting complaint is incredibly helpful and will give every medical student the confidence to diagnose, manage and treat the patients they encounter in all aspects of surgery using a problem-oriented clinical approach.