Decision Making in Medicine: An Algorithmic Approach (3rd edition)


This book comprehensively covers a wide spectrum of diagnostic and management problems ranging from general conditions such as “fatigue” and “low back pain” to the more specific such as “solitary pulmonary nodule” and “choosing a chronic dialysis modality”.

The book is well structured into conventional subspecialties and subjects of interest easily located.

For each subject there is an introduction and descriptive text with an accompanying algorithm on the facing page.

Each topic is written by an expert in their field. The algorithms provide a route map towards a final diagnosis and an outline of management.

Perhaps inevitably algorithms visually diminish the importance of history and examination. Looking at them in detail the North American authorship clearly comes through. For example, that all patients with type I diabetes should be offered insulin pumps would neither be common practice nor practical in many places. First choice for managing a DVT appears to be intravenous heparin rather than subcutaneous low molecular-weight heparin as would commonly be used here, accepting this is considered as an option.

Overall I think the editors and authors have done a good job. This text will be particularly useful as a framework for those developing clinical pathways. Undoubtedly the use of algorithms is going to increase. Much as I like books with pages to turn, as a reference text this might be more useful in the downloadable format, assuming the authors of the algorithms are able to provide timely updates. Whilst treatment is covered, this is limited, and not a criticism of the book but to inform purchasers.

I am not sure this book will solve my “toughest cases”, which the publishers suggest it might. Those patients tend not to fit the precise boxes of an algorithm. But it may well help and will be a useful addition to our departmental (General Medicine) library.

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