



Manual of Clinical Methods. P. S. Shankar. Oxford and IBH Publishing Co Pvt Ltd, S-155, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi 110 017. 2005. 362 pp.

There is no dearth of books detailing clinical methods in medicine. One may also wonder about the relevance of such books in this era of high-technology medicine. 'But a doctor who cannot take a good history and a patient who cannot give one are in danger of giving and receiving bad treatment'. It is with these thoughts in mind that I sat down to read Shankar's book on clinical methods in medicine. The first thing that appealed was the Indian flavour of the content. Seasoned clinicians acquire practical knowledge and expertise, as each case is a fresh challenge and as no two patients are alike. They develop their own ways of approach in solving these problems. This type of knowledge never gets captured in a textbook. In this context Shankar's effort is highly laudable. Necessary emphasis has been given to chapters on history taking, interrogation and case-sheet writing. Importance of aspects such as posture, appearance, height, build, nutrition, and skin and body parts from head to foot is well covered. There is detailed description of examination of various systems: digestive, respiratory, cardiovascular, nervous and locomotor.

I found the session on clinical photographs educative and inspiring. Many are black and white photographs, but that does not in any way lessen their importance. For a change, both common and uncommon diseases are represented. Many pictures are bound to stay in your mind for easy recall.

Students will find it easier to follow line diagrams given in the book compared to pompous colour plates with too much detail. Shankar has introduced a novel way of linking history to clinical

methods. To quote an example, 'there is abnormal dryness [conjunctivitis sicca] due to lacrimal gland diseases [Sjogren's syndrome, named after Henrik Sjogren, Swedish Ophthalmologist]'. I feel such tributes to stalwarts in medical history will kindle interest among students to know more about these great scientists.

Shankar never assumes that the reader has prior knowledge. Concepts are well graded, progressing from basics to most appropriate deep-level information.

Each chapter begins with a quote that triggers some lateral thinking and avoids monotony. The language is simple and straightforward. In his preface to the first edition, the author has quoted William Osler: 'To carefully observe the phenomena of life in all its phases, normal and perverted, to make perfect the most difficult of all arts, the art of observation, to call to aid the science of experimentation, to cultivate the reasoning faculty so as to be able to know the true from the false are our methods'. On completing the book one can confidently say that Shankar has commendably achieved his goals.

The keepsake book is light and handy with suitable layout and a nice cover. Thus the book is an encyclopaedia of clinical methods in medicine and I strongly recommend this scholarly manual to the medical fraternity.

At a personal level the book gave me the feel of a good teacher communicating with efficiency and sincerity.

A. ANAND KUMAR

*Department of Neurology,
Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences,
Kochi 682 026, India
e-mail: bhadra@spectrum.net.in*

Word Matters: Multicultural Perspectives on Information Societies. Alain Ambrosi *et al.* (eds). C&F editions, 14000 Caen, France. 2005, pp. 649. Price: Euro 39. Published under Creative Commons licence.

This is a remarkable book in more than one way. It is a collection of 27 essays by about thirty authors from all over the world and its purpose is to decipher the central concepts of the information society at a time when information and knowledge

are fast becoming central to our lives and key drivers of change. It brings together the points of view of civil societies in an effort to counter the positions of the dominant sections of the world with citizens' response. It is multilingual, as it should be. After all, words are not neutral and they derive their meaning from the history of the society from which they emanate.

Words such as development, community networking and information mean different things to different people, depending on socio-cultural and political realities, and often the dominant cultures have their way. Take for example, the simple phrase 'down under' used to denote Australia as it is on the other side of the globe for people living in the UK. But for us living in India the antipodes are the United States and the Americas. Every time I fill forms, I am asked for my first name (or Christian name) and surname (or family name). Sorry, I have just one name, and I have to use my father's (one) name either as my surname or first name! Every time I do that I am yielding to the tyranny of the West which has developed its own system for naming people, as botanists have evolved the binary names in Latin for plants, which is perfectly all right. But making the rest of us follow the same system, even though we are in the majority, simply because the Western culture is currently the dominant culture, is clearly imposing alien ways on others! It is the same mindset that emboldens the US government 'to reject multilateralism and international democratization', refuse 'to sign the Kyoto Agreement and to join the International Court of Justice' and systematically obstruct 'reforms for the UN systems and any attempt to democratize the international political arena'. The world today genuinely faces the threat of losing out to a monolithic vision of our future society and technology being used in ways that can harm our freedom and fundamental rights.

The rapid changes that the world has witnessed in the past few decades, thanks to developments in the way we process information and allow it to determine the way we live and do things, have led to the evolution of the 'information society'. But there is not one information society; there are many 'information societies'. Somewhat like faucets in hotel bathrooms; no two hotels have the same kind and I have often got scalded by near-boiling hot water. We need multicultural perspectives to understand the different