

Book Reviews

Medicines for Children 2003

Published by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health in conjunction with Neonatal and Paediatrics Pharmacists Group

Price UK and Europe including postage: £60

The second edition of *Medicines for Children* has now been published and updated. This edition should only build on the success of the first and provide an excellent guide to all health professionals who prescribe medicines for children. It has become the standard text for prescribing for most hospitals within the UK. This edition is a green colour compared with the first edition's blue and again has the helpful wipe clean cover.

The layout of the book remains essentially the same with an initial introduction section followed by a guidance section and then an alphabetical section of drugs following this. It is finished by separate sections on the eye products and nutritional supplements which are very helpful to paediatricians such as myself who may not have comprehensive knowledge within these areas.

In the introduction section there is a new section for nurse prescribing and a larger section on adverse drug reactions, with contact details which are helpful. There is also an extended section on breastfeeding, which I find helpful when trying to assess whether a drug a mother is taking may have an adverse effect.

An excellent change is that the guidelines section has now been placed in alphabetical order by speciality which makes it much easier for quick reference. This provides an excellent guide to junior doctors and general practitioners when prescribing. In the new edition it contains some guidelines as page long flow diagrams, such as a guideline for tonic clonic seizures (G67), which can be very useful in emergency situations and are a good addition. Many of these guidelines are referenced back to their original source such as the APLS guidelines. A new speciality within the guidelines section is palliative care. This gives good guidance to general practitioners and general

paediatricians in the areas of pain and symptom control for when these children may be referred back to their care.

The guidelines section is useful as a guide for junior doctors in conditions that they are experiencing for the first time in their training. It should however, not be used as a textbook, as basic knowledge is still needed of these diseases. It will provide a helpful adjunct for general practitioners, practice nurses and A&E doctors in current prescribing trends. In the life support section there is reference to the APLS guidelines (G52) and in the endocrine section the treatment of diabetic ketoacidosis (ref G10) is referenced to the British Society of Paediatric Endocrinology Diabetes Guidelines 2001, and a website address is given. However, many of the guidelines do not state a reference and therefore it is difficult to assess their evidence base and this is a major weakness of the guidelines section.

The alphabetic drug section still remains the best part of this book. It is essential text for any person prescribing for children, although this may be limited because of the price of the book.

The drug section layout is still in the same very easy to use format of the first book. This section has also been extended and now contains 682 pages of drugs versus the 569 pages in the first edition. It gives a dose usually by weight but sometimes by age group and the calculation is made per dose and then the frequency is given (which may not be the case in some other formularies such as the Alder Hey formulary for children). Within a page it gives you all the information you need to prescribe the drug, check its formulation, look at its side effects and know its licensing status. The section on the formulation of the medicine such as in suspension or tablet form is especially useful. It allows one to tailor the dose in a sensible manner for parents, such

as the number of mls of a drug in liquid formulation or prescription of tablets. This is an essential part of prescribing in children and something that the book does well. The green box given under the dosage box again gives a clear guide to monitoring of the drug, interactions, side effects and pharmacokinetics.

The section on licensing status is also useful but it is a shame that the annotation and symbols from the *Pocket Medicines for Children*, which give a very clear indication of the licensing status have not been carried over into the main edition.

The doses of medicines for use in the premature neonate are not always given, which is a weakness, and therefore *Medicines for Children* cannot be the sole text used in this age group. There has been some change to dosage recommendations in the neonatal age group, e.g. gentamicin. Unfortunately, as there are no

references given for this change it is difficult to know what evidence this change has been based on.

In conclusion, I think the new edition of *Medicines for Children* has only improved on the otherwise very good first edition. I would recommend anybody who prescribes for children to buy this book as their primary reference text. It is an essential book for prescribing in the paediatric outpatient or ward setting, but also in a general practice setting and other hospital departments such as the accident and emergency department where children may be seen. It is a shame that it is not available currently in an electronic form and would also be useful in a form that could be accessed on a palm pilot on the wards. The main limitation at the moment still remains the price. I do not hesitate to recommend it to all people who prescribe medicines to the paediatric age group.

Pocket Medicines for Children 2003

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The larger version of *Medicines for Children* has been available since 1999 and a pocket edition has been available since 2001. This new edition for 2003 accompanies the updating of the larger formulary. One of the major criticisms of the initial *Medicines for Children* was its size and therefore the difficulty for a paediatrician to carry it around. This pocket edition is however an excellent size and weight for it to fit in your pocket allowing it to be carried by junior doctors and pharmacists as a reference.

The difference between the pocket edition and main edition is that it does not contain the guidelines section, individual section on prescribing for the eye and has a cut down version of nutritional tables and special infant formulas. This does not weaken the book as its essential role was to be portable. If information like this is required then reference to the larger formulary can take place.

This new edition contains brief introductory notes which explain the tables for prescribing clearly. A glossary shows the terms and symbols used in

the book, such as the symbols which indicate the licensing status of the medication in the paediatric age group. There are also symbols that indicate contraindications for use in renal and liver disease and a symbol where the medicine is contraindicated in breast feeding mothers. Emergencies are covered briefly at the beginning of the book. Also included in this edition, which was not in the previous edition, are monograms for the calculation of body surface area and weight which are a great addition.

The differences in the alphabetical section between this pocket edition and the full edition are that only the essential information is available. There is no section to indicate the use for the drug but the formulation of the drug such as tablet and suspension form is still included, which helps with prescribing of manageable doses for parents. There is a dosage chart, which is very clear, giving the doses in mg/kg for the different age groups. The frequency is given and notes indicate changes in dose that may occur in specific circumstances, such as benzylpenicillin in meningitis when doses may be increased. There

is a shortened green box section on administration, side effects and monitoring of therapy.

In summary, *Pocket Medicines for Children 2003* should not replace *Medicines for Children 2003* but is an excellent adjunct for those who need a portable version, such as junior doctors on the ward and pharmacists. It is easy to read and has all the necessary information for prescribing of the common drugs. Its layout is clear and the inclusion of surface area tables in this edition strengthens its usefulness. The clear symbols used

for licensing, contraindications in renal and liver disease and breast feeding are excellent and quickly highlight their point to the reader. Its only restriction remains the number of drug monograms but then in more complex drugs the larger *Medicines for Children* should be referred to.

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