

Books

Complications of Abortion. Technical and Managerial Guidelines for Prevention and Treatment

WHO. Pp. 147. Illustrated. Sw.Fr.35/US\$31.50. Geneva: WHO. 1995. ISBN 92-4-154469-4.

This publication produced by WHO's Maternal Health and Safe Motherhood programme, provides technical and management guidelines for the prevention and treatment of abortion complications. It is addressed at programme managers of women's health care, who could also be clinicians.

The book begins with a very comprehensive global overview of the morbidity and mortality resulting from abortion complications or 'unsafe' abortions. This situates the problem internationally as a major public health issue. While acknowledging that many unsafe abortions may have been illegally induced, WHO leaves decisions about abortion legislation to national governments. The emphasis of the book is on the prevention and management of unsafe abortion by priority provision of 24-hour emergency services for abortion complications and safe elective termination of pregnancy, where legally permitted. Such services must be available, accessible and of high quality. Whatever the personal views of health workers, WHO states that they are ethically obliged to give high quality humane care to all women requiring emergency care for an abortion complication irrespective of their aetiology.

The publication provides very detailed and comprehensive guidelines for managers and clinicians concerning the planning and organisation of emergency and elective abortion services. Many practical examples are given. Sensible and cost-effective guidelines are given for what can be done at each level of care: community, primary care clinics, first referral level hospital, secondary hospital and tertiary hospitals. Stress is placed on decentralised abortion care with the least specialised person competent to do a procedure performing it at the site most accessible to the woman. Thus the first referral level hospital is seen as the site which must be available to deal with all aspects of emergency abortion care, the most severe complications only requiring secondary and tertiary hospital care. It is also suggested that non-physicians at primary care clinics may be trained to evacuate the uterus for simple uncomplicated first trimester abortions. The stress is on outpatient procedures, using the manual vacuum aspiration equipment. Local anaesthesia and/or analgesics with sedation are recommended rather than general anaesthetic. The logistics of training strategies for such programmes are discussed.

Additional chapters on postabortion contraceptive counselling, screening for infections, audit and data collections add to the comprehensive coverage of the topic.

The annexes or appendices give detailed practical examples of equipment and resources required, training programmes and data collection forms, for implementing improved abortion care.

Overall, the book deserves merit for drawing attention to what has often been perceived as a 'low priority' area of gynaecology, by stressing the importance of high quality abortion care. With the stress on decentralised, cost-effective and appropriate care, this publication is particularly relevant for South Africa today, given policy discussions and plans to promote and improve primary care for women and the debate on revision of abortion legislation.

There are a few areas where constructive comment can be made:

- a) abortion care is presented as a single management problem, whereas in practice it is likely to be part of a comprehensive MCH, FP or primary health care service. How it is managed in the context of linked services it is not clearly defined;
- b) insufficient attention is given to medical methods for managing elective abortions. Newer drugs, e.g. RU486 and misoprostil, have simplified the management of elective abortions by ripening the cervix in first trimester pregnancies, and causing abortion in 2nd trimester pregnancies. The publication advocates dilatation and embryotomy for 2nd trimester abortions, a procedure which has been superseded by safer medical methods.

S. Fawcus

Treatment of the Postmenopausal Woman: Basic and Clinical Aspects

Edited by Rogerio A. Lobo. Pp. 463. Illustrated. US\$174. New York: Raven Press. 1994. ISBN 0-7817-0113-9.

The menopause now constitutes at least a third of gynaecological practice, and hormone replacement therapy (HRT) has become big business. This book provides a comprehensive overview with individual chapters by recognised authorities on the various aspects of the menopause. These cover pathophysiology, endocrinology, pharmacology as well as clinical presentation and management, while sections on osteoporosis, cardiovascular disease, life style, neoplasia and risks and benefits are also included.

The chapters vary in style and approach. Some are almost too detailed whereas others veer on the lean side. One or two chapters such as those on the 'Use of Androgens' and 'Influence of Cigarette Smoking on the Menopause' cover relatively new ground and are the more valuable. There are, however, some gaps, for example contraception and the place of surgery in perimenopausal women. The problem of bleeding, whether induced withdrawal or breakthrough, might have merited more discussion as it is currently the biggest barrier to long-term HRT. Overall considerations as to the long-term benefits and risks of HRT almost take precedence over the shorter term treatment of symptoms and the possible immediate side-effects of HRT.

The book is perhaps a little too long to be regarded as a manual of management. It can nevertheless be warmly recommended to all those requiring information on any special aspect of the menopause and should be on the shelves of every medical library.

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