
Since the introduction of the National Health Service there has been a steep rise in the incidence of self-poisoning, and acute poisoning now accounts for some 10% of all medical emergency admissions. Yet the newly qualified house officer, who is frequently confronted with these cases in the middle of the night, has probably had little or no experience in the handling of this type of problem. This little book, therefore, fulfills a real need and useful function. Its layout, intent, and scope are entirely practical and designed for easy and quick reference. A good example of this practical design is the list of telephone numbers of the Poisons Information Service prominently displayed on the back cover of the book.

The first chapter deals with the problem of poisoning in general. This is followed by a description of the work of the Poisons Information Service, after which the diagnosis of poisoning and the identification of the various poisons are discussed. The laboratory tests for the newer poisons are briefly described. Basic supportive medical treatment applicable to all forms of acute poisoning is discussed next, and the emphasis is on practical features and such simple, but important points, as the positioning of the unconscious patient in the lateral position, are not forgotten. Simple, clear diagrams are used to illustrate these points where necessary. There follows a clear and lucid description of the management of forced diuresis and peritoneal lavage. The next chapter deals with the element of psychiatric treatment. The book then goes on to deal with individual poisons in greater detail, ranging from the common barbiturates and salicylates to the newer tranquilizers and antidepressants as well as the heavy metals and other drugs commonly and likely to be freely accessible in a lot of homes. Finally, there are two chapters dealing with snake poisoning and the poisoning by fungi, plants, shrubs, and trees. The book concludes with a short chapter on the prevention of acute poisoning. Although not specifically aimed at paediatricians there are references to the special problems of children where applicable, e.g. when discussing forced enuresis or the type of drugs most likely to be taken by inquisitive toddlers.

No doubt this book will soon be found in every casualty department and will be readily available in every medical ward.