

Book Reviews

Clinical Essentials of Calcium and Skeletal Disorders. Leonard Deftos. Professional Communication, Inc., Caddo, OK. Pages: 316. ISBN 1-884735-39-8.

Dr. Deftos has written a splendid little handbook 'designed as a basic primer for individuals interested in calcium and skeletal metabolism and their disorders. It is intended to have wide appeal, ranging from students to practitioners.' As a practicing clinical endocrinologist with an interest in osteoporosis and skeletal disorders, I found this book lived up to its claims. Small enough to fit into a white coat pocket, the book is packed with readable, useful, and up-to-date information on every page.

The handbook is divided into four major sections: Regulation of Skeletal and Calcium Metabolism, Diseases of Calcium Metabolism, Major Diseases of Skeletal Metabolism, and Other Diseases of Skeletal and Calcium Metabolism. These four sections are further subdivided into thirteen chapters, ranging from common disorders such as hypercalcemia, hyperparathyroidism, kidney stones/hypercalciuria, and osteoporosis to those less commonly seen, such as multiple endocrine neoplasia, renal osteodystrophy, disorders of magnesium and phosphorus, and rare bone diseases. The topics obviously overlap and are extensively cross-referenced.

Dr. Deftos has adapted the handbook from his lectures to students, clinicians, and faculty at the University of California at San Diego. The material is presented in a readable format with descriptive text balanced by numerous charts, tables, and figures. An extensive index allows quick searches for specific topics. Perhaps most remarkable are the references at the end of each chapter which are exceptionally up-to-date. Articles published in 1997 and 1998 predominate so that the material is unusually current and timely. Academicians will appreciate the succinct scientific data presented on topics such as osteoblast and osteoclast regulation and the genetics of multiple endocrine neoplasia. Clinicians will find useful tables and descriptions of clinical signs, symptoms, differential diagnoses, disease etiologies, and therapies covering the full range of calcium and skeletal disorders.

The chapter on 'Osteoporosis' is the longest in the handbook, comprising 67 pages. Overall, it is a well-organized and up-to-date overview of the field. The chapter includes the most recent National Osteoporosis Foundation recommendations for bone densitometry measurements as well as the 1998 HCFA regulations for Medicare coverage of bone densitometry. In the section on estrogen therapy for osteoporosis, Dr. Deftos notes the dearth of clinical trial data regarding estrogen and fractures and cites the recent HERS

study as an example of a clinical trial failing to support observational studies. In the discussion of the SERMS (selective estrogen receptor modulators), he includes data from the unpublished MORE Study showing a 50% reduction in vertebral fractures in the raloxifene (Evista) treated group compared to placebo. Under the heading of bisphosphonates, we learn that pamidronate (Aredia) increases bone density and decreases fractures when given continuously by mouth or intravenously every 3 months. We also learn that similar to hormone replacement therapy, 50% of patients stop taking alendronate (Fosamax) by the end of the first year.

Unfortunately, perhaps due to time or space constraints, Dr. Deftos does not cite references within the body of the text. This frustrating omission negates some of the usefulness of the handbook by making it so difficult to locate original sources of the data presented. Other minor problems include contradictory statements such as: 'Patients with osteopenia do not have increased fracture risk' (p. 196) followed by: "10% of black women over age 50 have osteoporosis and an additional 30% have increased fracture risk 'due to low bone density' (p. 197). Or, in a table on Osteoporosis Risk Factors, thiazides are listed as 'calciuretic agents' (p. 200) but then we read 'thiazide diuretics have been variably reported to increase bone mass by conserving renal calcium' (p. 209).

Despite these comments, I would strongly recommend this handbook to students, housestaff, fellows, faculty, and clinicians as a useful primer on calcium and skeletal disorders. However, I would encourage Dr Deftos to write an updated version in two years with references included directly within the text. By so doing, he will make this little handbook truly 'handy' for all who use it.

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