

BOOK REVIEW

“HAEMORRHAGE AND THROMBOSIS FOR THE MRCOG AND BEYOND”

Editor: Ann Harper
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Haemorrhage and thromboembolism, both important disorders of the coagulation system, are leading causes of maternal deaths and they also pose significant risks in gynaecology and perinatology. The preface, like the title of the book, states that it will be useful to candidates preparing for the MRCOG examination and also modestly that it may provide some practical guidance for doctors who occasionally encounter these conditions.

This soft-cover pocket-size book consists of 132 pages of text that are divided into eight chapters, each with useful succinct key points and up-to-date references. This is a very well-summarised book for the MRCOG candidate as well as the seasoned obstetrician and gynaecologist. The book emphasises fundamental principles and key points of relevant aspects of haemostasis and thrombosis in obstetrics and gynaecology (O&G), which hitherto have generally been buried deep among the standard O&G textbooks; and it achieves its objectives admirably. The authors are clearly hands-on practitioners and this is reflected in the style and practical risk-oriented manner in which the topics are approached.

The line-up of the eight chapters is apt, namely: “The coagulation system in pregnancy”, “Pregnancy in women with inherited bleeding disorders”, “Maternal and foetal thrombocytopenia”, “Massive obstetric haemorrhage”, “Disseminated intravascular coagulation”, “Gynaecological problems in women with bleeding disorders”, “Venous thromboembolism in obstetrics and gynecology” and “Genetic thrombophilias and antiphospholipid antibodies”. This is indeed a rare book that brings together and synthesises various aspects on haemostasis and thrombosis (which can be difficult and heavy going in most textbooks), relevant to obstetrics and gynaecology, in a very readable fashion. It would save the busy MRCOG trainee much time, effort and perhaps agony when pursuing key knowledge and practical tips on thrombosis and haemorrhage just by reading this book first.

The strength of the book is in its summary of fundamental principles and important facts of the subject topics. This is helped by the liberal use of chapter key points, tables of risk stratification, and various classifications of severity. The tables are informative and concise, and diagrams useful. I am particularly pleased that the B-Lynch brace suture, pictorial menstrual blood loss assessment chart and guidelines of management of massive haemorrhage are illustrated clearly.

Including the main editor, there are 11 contributors (who are obstetricians/gynaecologists, physicians haematologists and pathologists). This multidisciplinary collaboration itself echoes the importance of close working relationships between the various disciplines in providing optimal care for the various disorders highlighted. Despite the multi-author nature of the book, the style is consistently good, and explanations are clear and concise. The area of management of haemostasis and thrombosis is rapidly changing, particularly with regard to evidence-based practice. The references of the book chapters are very up-to-date, and include important guidelines and reports up to 2004.

While the prominent list of abbreviations peculiar to thrombosis and haemostasis and the book index make searching and understanding easy, the photographic image on the cover page (which happen to depict the only photographic image in the whole book) is unappealing. A landscape orientation showing the full cranial magnetic resonance image on a reduced scale would be far more intuitive and engaging. Some photographic images of thrombosis, albeit black and white, would make good illustrative points and these are conspicuously absent. Helpful case histories were provided in one chapter but a sample list of typical MRCOG examination-related questions might be even more pertinent to reiterate the importance and relevance of the topics to MRCOG.

More emphasis on certain important aspects (which will enhance its comprehensiveness) should perhaps be given. Ectopic pregnancy, a common gynaecologist's diagnostic bugbear and possible haemostatic nightmare, surprisingly was treated only to a page or so under the chapter of "Massive obstetric haemorrhage". It probably deserves a chapter by itself, and guidelines on how to optimally manage a case of suspected or ruptured ectopic pregnancy would be pertinent. With an epidemic of Caesarean sections in recent times, the number of cases relating to morbidly adherent placenta previa to Caesarean scars and surrounding structures is on the rapid rise. The management of such cases, including operative approaches and the difficult option of leaving the placenta intact in uterus, deserves more mention. Anaemia, a common condition which weakens the obstetric patient response to haemorrhage, is hardly discussed.

Still, I will strongly recommend this handy up-to-date book for the busy obstetrician/gynaecologist teacher, and make use of it personally when asked to explain difficult concepts of thrombosis and haemostasis to junior colleagues in my hospital. The fact that this is one of the titles in the well-received MRCOG and Beyond series, makes it essential reading for all MRCOG trainees. It is, on its own merit, a valuable introductory text to the difficult subject of thrombosis and haemorrhage and deserves a place in any O&G departmental library. From the RCOG website, the books of MRCOG and Beyond series retail at £26.00 which is quite reasonable.

Dr Tan Kok Hian, MMed, FRCOG, FAMS
Senior Consultant
Department of Maternal-Foetal Medicine
Division of Obstetrics and Gynaecology
KK Women's and Children's Hospital
100 Bukit Timah Road
Singapore 229899