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BOOK REVIEW

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***"Users' Guide to the Medical Literature -
A Manual for Evidence Based Clinical Practice"***

*Edited by Gordon Guyatt and Drummond Rennie, 2002, AMA Press, Chicago,
706 pages, ISBN 1-57947-174-9 Recommended retail price: \$170.00.AUD*

This book is the result of what began more than a decade ago as a series of articles that were published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA). The series ran from 1993 to 2000. The forebears of this series were a similar but small series of articles published in the Canadian Medical Association Journal, beginning in 1981. But as well as a genealogy, this book has a pedigree. The father of evidence based medicine; David Sackett worked closely with at least some of the editors and contributors to this volume, and has clearly provided inspiration to the many fine contributors. His intellectual fingerprints are all over these pages – and a good thing too.

The structure of the book is logical and helpful to the reader, even starting with the obvious, but often overlooked chapter in an instruction text 'how to use this book'. The text is divided into two major sections.

Part 1 is called The basics: Using the Medical Literature. This section runs to 199 pages and covers the fundamental principles that any health practitioner needs to be able to find, read and evaluate the medical literature. The authors take a systematic approach to this process. Fundamental elements to successful use of the published literature are carefully explained and reinforced.

A thorough reading and referral to Part 1 of this text will give any interested reader what they will need to identify, locate and understand published literature; enable them to distinguish between stronger and weaker evidence; and to appreciate some of the complexities of applying these findings to clinical practice.

Part 2 of the text is called Beyond the Basics: Using and Teaching the Principles of Evidence Based Medicine. The authors accurately describe this section of the text as "... directed to clinicians who want to practice EBM at a more sophisticated level." This section takes the reader into deeper theoretical water and explores issues such as methodological design issues and statistical analyses. The likely readership for much of the content in part 2 will be people who have a senior clinical teaching role, or for those who are undertaking postgraduate studies that require a more advanced

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understanding of EBM issues. The added depth of content in this section will exceed the requirements of the uninitiated, while meeting the needs of those seeking a more thorough knowledge and understanding of a specific issue.

One of the good features of the text is that many of the sections in part 2 are parallel to sections in part 1 meaning that readers can dip into only those sections in part 2 that meet their learning needs without having to wade through material that may not be of immediate use or need.

The text is well designed, and has a logical structure. The appendix, glossary and index are all quite comprehensive and easy to use. The page layout is clear, but I would have preferred a larger format and fewer pages as the current layout makes the book something of a 'brick'. The accompanying CD, like the text is clear and reasonably intuitive to use, although there are sometimes several mouse clicks needed to find the information that is sought.

So, what is stopping me from making a wholehearted recommendation to add this text to your library? The cost. At a recommended retail price of around A\$170, many readers will think more than twice before purchasing this otherwise excellent text. Perhaps the publishers could consider publishing Part 1 as a separate and more affordable title aimed at the general reader, with a 'bells and whistles' two part version for the more advanced reader, or for institution purchase.