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Book review

Martindale: The Complete Drug Reference. 38th ed.

London: Pharmaceutical Press; 2014
4109 pages

Also available online www.medicinescomplete.com

This book is presented as a hefty two volume set housed in a simple outer case. My first impression of this edition is that it is extremely heavy (about 6 kg) and has a large footprint, so make sure it's kept on a low shelf!

There have been significant changes in the presentation of information since the 37th edition. Volume A consists of monographs covering a wide range of drug classes as well as sections on pesticides and repellents, radiopharmaceuticals and sex hormones and their modulators. The section 'Vaccines, immunoglobulins and antisera' contains a wealth of information on the effects of vaccines on a patient's organs. Volume B contains a list of selected preparations, manufacturers, pharmaceutical terms and indexes.

The drug monographs are laid out in an easy-to-read manner and have been restructured. 'Uses and administration' appears immediately after the physicochemical description of the substance. In contrast to other references such as Micromedex and

MIMS, the pharmacokinetic information for products appears at the end of the monograph, after the interactions and adverse effects.

The information is current and well researched, although there were some gaps in entries, especially with respect to complementary and alternative therapies. The location of these products was also confusing, with some like milk thistle listed under 'Chelators, antidotes and antagonists' and others like garlic included in 'Miscellaneous drugs and other substances'.

The most obvious change to the drug monographs is the deletion of the chemical structure diagrams in the print version. This has allowed for a restructure of the monographs using larger font size to increase readability. Unfortunately, this deletion has removed the ability to quickly compare the structures of substances. This was useful when trying to ascertain whether structurally based cross-reactivity between drugs may exist. The disclaimer that this information is available in the electronic form of Martindale is provided in the preface to this edition and begs the question 'Is the print version still relevant?'

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