BOOK REVIEW

HANDBOOK OF OTOLARYNGOLOGY HEAD AND NECK SURGERY

By: David Goldenberg, Bradley J. Goldstein, Thieme Publishers, New York, New York, 2010, 802 pp, $89.95

Handbook of Otolaryngology Head and Neck Surgery is a first-edition, soft-cover pocket-reference handbook that provides relatively comprehensive quick clinical reference for all major topics in otolaryngology head and neck surgery. There are 54 contributing authors and a 6-member board of review. The 2 book editors consist of an academic head and neck oncologist and an otolaryngologist in community practice, both with highly reputable training.

The authors’ stated goal was to design “an ideal clinical handbook for otolaryngology-head and neck surgery” and particularly one that was “highly detailed, thorough, [and] well-organized.” It was not intended to include “nonclinical, basic science, or board review trivia.” The handbook’s 160 chapters in 679 pages of text are divided among the following 7 sections: Perioperative Care and General Otolaryngology, Otology, Rhinology, Laryngology and the Upper Aerodigestive Tract, Head and Neck, Pediatric Otolaryngology, and Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery. The book thus encompasses the majority of the spectrum of otolaryngology head and neck surgery clinical training and practice, but does not emphasize basic physiology and pharmacology.

Each section is subdivided into between 4 and 18 subsections, which too are sometimes subdivided into up to 12 subsections. Each topic is thus only a few pages in length and amenable to quick review. Most subsections employ a standard format including review of anatomy, key features, epidemiology, clinical features, evaluation, investigations, treatment options, and outcome/follow-up or complications. Each topic is thus presented in a clinically relevant, transfer-appropriate manner. The chapters typically include bullet point lists, tables, algorithms, and diagrams for reference. This likely also facilitates trainee learning and recall of the relevant information. Most chapters also include International Classification of Disease (ICD)-9 codes and a short list of references, most of which are contemporaneous and review in nature.

Particularly valuable features in this reviewer’s opinion are the 3 appendices. The first reviews indications, advantages, disadvantages, steps, and complications of 7 common junior-resident-level otolaryngologic procedures in a manner that is useful for immediate pre-procedure review and mental rehearsal. The second provides a limited review of cranial nerve anatomy and function, primarily through diagrams and a table. The last is a quick reference table, which identifies which chapter in the handbook to reference for 48 major otolaryngologic emergencies. The handbook index has appropriate numbers of primary entries and subentries spanning the book with clear and consistent nomenclature.

At present there exist few appropriately detailed handbooks for graduate medical level training in otolaryngology. While it is not explicitly stated, this handbook is implied to target this otolaryngology residency audience. As such, this book, with its breadth, depth, and format, provides a valuable contribution to this niche. The topics are appropriately selected, and each is reasonably thorough for clinical practice. With the multiplicity of authors, chapters do vary somewhat in their degree of detail and structure, but in general they are organized in clinically useful manners. This coverage is generally far too superficial for examination preparation, but that is beyond the intended scope of the handbook. Arguably, the handbook is likely to be most valuable at the junior and intermediate resident levels; however, it could be of value for superficial review at senior levels. The handbook would thus be appropriate for personal acquisition at the onset of otolaryngology residency training, or for senior medical students with interest in pursuing specialty training in otolaryngology, and particularly for those with on-call responsibilities. It may also be of value for physician assistants and for registered practical nurses early in practice in otolaryngology clinics. It is priced quite affordably for its content.

The chapter references are somewhat limited and vary in how current they are, but they are generally appropriate for the nature of the fundamental information presented. A limitation of the text is its size and weight. It is intended to fit in a lab coat pocket and measures 8” × 5” × 1.25” and weighs 1.4 lbs. It would thus completely fill most pockets and may be slightly cumbersome to carry for extended periods. A suggestion for future editions would be to include a smart phone or personal digital assistant (PDA) version. An additional suggestion for subsequent editions would be for Current Procedural Terminology (CPT) codes to be included for procedures discussed in addition to the ICD-9 codes already included.

In summary, the Handbook of Otolaryngology Head and Neck Surgery provides a relatively thorough, organized clinical reference. Its particular features are that it provides information in a clinically applicable manner; includes many diagrams, algorithms, lists, and tables; and has good quick reference features, including an appendix referencing emergencies and a well-organized index. It would thus be of value for personal acquisition for trainees and some practitioners in otolaryngology.

Maya G. Sardesai, MD, MEd
Seattle, WA