McQuay HJ, Moore RA. *An evidence-based resource for pain relief*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

An Evidence-Based Resource for Pain Relief can be purchased online at www.oup-usa.org/ for US \$65.00. The table of contents can also be viewed at this site.

The purpose of *An Evidence-Based Resource for Pain Relief* is to provide a useful resource for clinicians on the management of pain. The efforts of McQuay and Moore represent a huge step forward in the struggle to make sense of the evidence in pain management. The book is a collection of systematic reviews of a spectrum of pain management problems.

The first part of the volume is the most important because it guides the reader step by step through the process of how pain studies are done, the system used by authors to determine which studies should be included in their systematic reviews, and the analytical process used to draw the conclusions. In most chapters, the studies included in the systematic reviews are described and tabulated clearly. The authors also provide a conclusion about the efficacy of the treatment by including a number needed to treat—a useful tool for practising clinicians.

The reviews in the book discuss both acute and chronic pain. Such common problems as choosing acetaminophen or acetaminophen plus codeine for the management of acute pain and assessing the role of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs in acute and chronic pain are addressed. Specific treatments for such chronic pain problems as back pain or neuropathic pain are also examined, and both pharmacological and non-pharmacological treatments are discussed.

McQuay and Moore do not presume to have covered every area of pain management. For example, one major area that is not addressed is the use of long acting narcotics in the management of cancer pain. The authors express the intent to update the text, but they do not set out a timetable for this. They do, however, maintain (and quote from) a database of controlled trials on pain management, which is available on the internet.¹

I am interested in the evidence for pain management in palliative care. Studies of palliative care patients are quite rare, but extrapolations from other chronic pain models described in this book provide acceptable proxies for palliative care situations. For example, tricyclic antidepressants are likely to work in controlling neuropathic pain, whereas the evidence for local analgesics is less clear cut.

An Evidence-Based Resource for Pain Relief is a high quality textbook that will inform clinicians practising in pain management for some time to come. It also issues a challenge to other disciplines to organise their research similarly to enable rational assessment of the evidence to assist clinicians who are not expert in the field.

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1 Bandalier. <http://www.jr2.ox.ac.uk/bandalier/booth/painpag/index.html>.

Ratings

Methods/Quality of information: ★★★★★

Clinical usefulness: ★★★★★