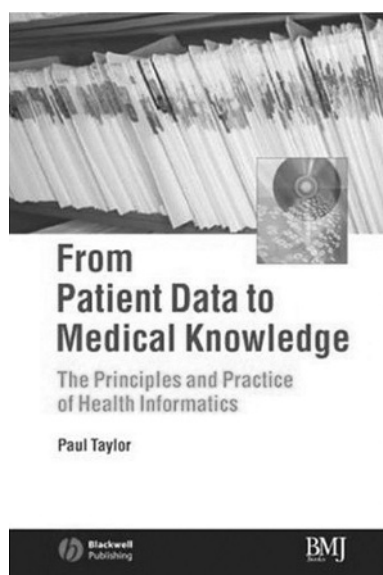


Resource review

Taylor P. *From patient data to medical knowledge: the principles and practice of health informatics*. London: Blackwell BMJ Books, 2006.



This book can be obtained from www.blackwellpublishing.com for £41.99 (US \$72.95).

The book *From patient data to medical knowledge* aims to provide an introduction to the theory, problems, and applications that make up the field of health informatics. The target audience is anyone who wishes to learn more about the use of informatics in health care. It is written clearly and simply so there is no need to be an expert in information, information technology, computer science, or health care.

Unfortunately, no information is given on how this resource was compiled or how it will be maintained. Evidence is cited, but there are no explicit criteria for the selection or evaluation of the content; however, the selection of the content suggests adherence to some evidence standards.

The book contains 3 parts. The first includes an introductory chapter and 3 further chapters that deal with what the author identifies as the 3 grand challenges in health informatics: reading and writing patient records, creation of medical knowledge, and access to medical knowledge by clinicians.

The second part deals with techniques used in informatics and their underlying theoretical bases. These include a brief introduction to logic and the application of logic for the representation of clinical concepts and knowledge in computer programs, ontologies, and informatics standards. Surprisingly, one also finds a discussion on probability in terms of decision analysis and statistical probability, which has relevance to machine learning and data mining.

The third part deals with the application of health informatics technologies to practice and includes a chapter on theories of organisational change. The following brief chapters discuss achieving changes in clinical practice by improving the dissemination of information and achieving change in clinical practice through information technologies.

This book contains a broad introduction to the field of health informatics. It is not intended to provide answers for day-to-day clinical practice, nor does it provide a primer on improving the electronic patient medical record, writing a computer program, accessing health data or health knowledge, or implementing a decision support program. As always, the devil is in the details.

However, we are increasingly using computers for recording patient consultations, undertaking electronic transactions and other communications, and accessing evidence and guidance for the care of our patients. It is likely that we will be increasingly involved with information technology projects including those that provide decision support and link patient records across different service providers. This book provides an easily readable insight into the realm of health informatics with its issues and complexities. If we gain greater understanding of this field we will be more able to contribute to the development of technologies and systems that will support us and our patients.

SUSAN WELLS, MBChB, Dip Obs, MPH(Hons), FRNZCGP, FAFPHM
School of Population Health, University of Auckland
Auckland, New Zealand

RATINGS

Methods/quality of information ★★★★★

Clinical usefulness ☆☆☆☆☆