

Book Review

Postoperative Pain Management: An Evidence-Based Guide to Practice

**George Shorten, Daniel Carr, Dominic Harmon,
Margarita Puig, and John Browne**
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Reviewed by Céline Gélinas

This book addresses postoperative pain management from an evidence-based medicine perspective. It has four sections: description of evidence-based practice and medicine, scientific basis of postoperative pain and analgesia, management of postoperative pain, and specific populations and clinical settings. The book seems to be intended primarily for physicians, as it is medically based and really focused on pain-management treatments.

I really enjoyed reading this well-written evidence-based book. It is an interesting reference for those who wish to know more about medical treatments in postoperative pain management and to be updated about evidence-based practice. However, I wish I could have learned more about pain assessment, monitoring of analgesic therapy and its side effects (e.g., respiratory depression), and non-pharmacological pain-management interventions. I would have also appreciated the inclusion of a chapter on the critically ill. Many critically ill patients undergo surgery and are intubated and/or unconscious (e.g., trauma patients). These patients are unable to communicate their pain and receive many different drugs (e.g., sedatives, opioids, cardiac medications). Drug interactions would have been another interesting topic to be discussed with regard to this particular situation.

Levels of evidence used in the book vary from one chapter to another, which makes the task of the reader difficult. The structure of the chapters would have benefited from standardization in terms of levels of evidence discussed as well as study results reported to support levels of evidence. Evidence-based practice could have been summarized in tables or boxes in all of the relevant chapters. This would have been an interesting way of attracting the attention of readers and leading them to the important information as a guide for practice.

The main strength of *Postoperative Pain Management* is its evidence base, which is very relevant for clinicians. Other strengths are the fact that a wide variety of medical treatments for postoperative pain are discussed; pre-emptive and preventive approaches to pain management are outlined, with a view to achieving better pain relief and decreasing the risk of postoperative complications; and the sometimes neglected areas of postoperative pain management in children and in the elderly are included.

The book has four major weaknesses. First, little information about pain assessment is provided and some of the information that is provided is inaccurate. For instance, the Wong and Baker Faces Pain Scale is not the best picture scale to recommend, since it has been criticized as assessing emotions (being happy or sad) rather than pain intensity (Chambers & Craig, 1998). Also, the authors state that pain in non-verbal patients can be evaluated on the basis of physiological responses. Except for infants undergoing procedural pain, physiological indicators are not considered valid cues for the assessment of pain (Herr et al., 2006). Second, there is little information on pain assessment in non-verbal populations. Recommendations about valid pain-assessment tools for clinical practice could have been discussed in the text. Third, the book includes little information on the monitoring of patients who are receiving pain treatments. For example, clinicians need solid recommendations on the monitoring of respiratory depression as a side effect of opioids. Also, evidence-based protocols on the monitoring of patients with PCA (patient-controlled analgesia) or epidural analgesia would have been useful as a guide for practice. Fourth, non-pharmacological pain-management interventions are presented only briefly, with little evidence supporting their use in practice. Finally, given the many abbreviations and scientific terms used in the text, a list of abbreviations and a glossary could have been included at the back of the book.

Postoperative Pain Management is an interesting evidence-based reference for clinicians, especially physicians, wishing to know more about treatments for postoperative pain. A compact disc included with the book provides many case studies and useful self-assessment questions. However, the reader seeking a complete reference, including pain assessment, monitoring of analgesic therapy and its side effects, and non-pharmacological pain-management interventions, will be disappointed, as this book offers little information on these topics.

References

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