Book reviews


In the case of a chronic, progressive disease such as rheumatoid arthritis (RA), no single desired outcome or outcome measure is universally appropriate. Possible desired outcomes may differ significantly with regard to the disease phase or the perspective applied (patient's, practitioner's or purchaser's). This book on the measurement of outcomes in RA clearly shows how multidimensional the phenomenon is. It arouses many interesting questions, one of the most important being how to apply the measures of functional disability mainly assessed in research contexts to clinical practice?

The book sheds light on the consequences of the disease in terms of the WHO classification—that is, by making a distinction between impairment, disability, and handicap. It can be used as a 'minimanual' because it is well referenced and also provides information on methodological aspects and data collection and even advice on how to search literature on this topic, without forgetting the patient's perspective. The book itself is the outcome of a one day conference in Leeds in 1993. Against that background, it is not surprising that there is some overlapping information and repetition, which, however, will be eliminated in the future editions.

The chapter 'Measuring outcomes' clarifies in an interesting manner the wide range of issues on the outcome agenda. What are the desired outcomes, which interventions produce these outcomes, do they work within routine practice, whose outcomes should have priority, etc? I especially appreciated the chapter 'A methodological perspective'. It demonstrates the need to explore how the most common health status measures (Health Assessment Questionnaire and Arthritis Impact Measurement Scales) tested and developed in clinical trials can be used as a 'minimanual' because it is well referenced and also provides information on methodological aspects and data collection and even advice on how to search literature on this topic, without forgetting the patient's perspective. The book itself is the outcome of a one day conference in Leeds in 1993. Against that background, it is not surprising that there is some overlapping information and repetition, which, however, will be eliminated in the future editions.

The chapter 'Measuring impairment', however, seemed to be focused too much on x ray methods, while range of motion tests, such as the Keitel function test, were completely ignored. There is an active search for laboratory measures of outcome in RA beyond the erythrocyte sedimentation rate and C reactive protein, such as biochemical markers of bone and cartilage turnover. I would have appreciated a more profound presentation of these measures under the heading 'surrogate biochemical markers'. The same comment goes for the testing for specific HLA-DRB1 and DQ alleles (the shared epitope), especially in view of the ongoing discussion of their role as outcome measures in RA. The authors only discussed HLA-DR4 in the chapter 'An overview of studies of disease outcome'.

The chapter 'Measuring handicap' shows that this area is still in its infancy. The reader becomes convinced that measurement of patient perceived handicap provides important clinical and social information, which is missing from the existing outcome measures. Though most of the available measures of handicap are time consuming and suitable for research rather than clinical purposes, the chapter represents some newer tests that are quick and easy to complete. Hopefully, this important dimension in outcome measurement is coming into wider use in clinical practice.

The authors have made an important opening move, which will probably provoke discussion about the different perspectives on outcome in RA held by researchers, patients, and clinicians. The items they suggest for debate are: What is the purpose of collecting data on outcome in clinical practice? How should the clinician and the patient interpret the data? Which measures should be given priority?

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During the past 12 years both clinicians and researchers involved in rheumatology, haematology, clinical immunology, and gynaecology have been inundated with hundreds of manuscripts regarding the so called antiphospholipid syndrome (APS).

As a result of the spread of information about the pathogenesis and clinical aspect of antiphospholipid antibodies (APA) in humans, 'non-professional APA readers' have often puzzled by APA characterisation, criteria for APS definition, reliability of assays for APA detection, and APS management.

None the less, thanks to the growing number of clinical findings concerning APS, it has become apparent that understanding of this syndrome may be of interest to other medical specialties.

Asherson and colleagues faced the difficult task of going through the great amount of information on APS and to present it in a systematic and didactic way.

The book is homogeneously structured in three sections dealing with aetiopathogenic mechanisms of APS (section I), its clinical features and laboratory aspects (section II) and, finally, the new strategies for its management (section III).

The choice to subdivide the three sections into short chapters written by a number of experienced European, American, and Israeli contributors has the undoubted advantage of allowing a detailed review of all the issues examined. Most of the chapters are referenced until 1994, and some to 1995.

On the other hand, because of the number of contributors, repetition or overlap sometimes occur in the text, even if the structured format of each chapter leads to a final result that is pleasantly homogeneous.

Most of the chapters (especially those on pathology and clinical manifestations) are beautifully illustrated with black and white and colour reproductions.

The pathophysiological section benefits from the experience of the editor, Y Shoenfeld, and sheds light on the possible mechanisms of actions of APA. Because of the underlying 'rheumatological cut' of the book this section suffers from the lack of an 'haematological perspective' of APS pathogenesis. The same limitation occurs in the pages dedicated to the methods for detection of APA, especially when lupus anticoagulant is considered. This topic deserves a wider consideration in a separate chapter. The last chapter of the first section on the pathology of APS is remarkably well written and illustrated by J T Lie.

The most fascinating part of the book is the clinical section, edited by R A Asherson and R Cervera. All the clinical manifestations closely related with APA have been skilfully retrieved from the multitude of isolated case reports or small series of cases available in the medical literature. The final
result is a truly complete and organic treatise of great usefulness for everyday clinical practice.

In the last section of the book, edited by J C Piette, the (few) certainties and the (many) open questions on the management of the thrombotic event and on the possible prophylactic strategies to prevent fetal losses and thrombotic relapses are clearly outlined by the authors.

Overall, the book represents for rheumatologist and haematologists a complete compendium of the state of the art of APS during the first 10 years of its existence or (better) 'renaissance'. Moreover, thanks to the exhaustive clinical and therapeutic sections, it may be also considered as a good opportunity for clinicians and researchers from other specialties (paediatricians, gynaecologists, neurologists, dermatologists, nephrologists, ophthalmologists, cardiologists, pneumologists, and general practitioners) to face the 'minefield' of APS in a systematic and complete way.

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