



Reviews/Testimonials

Women's Health Across the Lifespan: A Pharmacotherapeutic Approach

Therapeutic Area: This book is a generalized overview of women's health issues.

Audience: Pharmacists, mid-level health-care providers, nurses, and students in a classroom setting.

Purpose: To give a broad overview of issues pertinent to women's health, especially in a classroom setting.

Content: This book is organized into 8 sections. Section 1 deals with historical and social issues from a feminist perspective, although efforts are made to incorporate some information from other perspectives. Section 2 includes a well-done general overview of the menstrual cycle and female anatomy useful for students, as well as a more general overview of social issues. Sections 3 through 6 provide a more detailed discussion on reproductive physiology, including common pathologies with treatments, which is especially informative for students. These medical sections include many useful tables of treatments and adverse effects. Section 4 provides a balanced overview of contraceptive methods and mechanisms of action. Section 6 briefly highlights a number of disease conditions especially common in women, and Section 7 deals exclusively with cancer in women, including a useful discussion on cervical cancer. Section 8 discusses ethical issues in women's health from a utilitarian standpoint. Each chapter has a different set of authors, but the overall tone is consistent and readable for the mid-level health-care provider or student. Many of the authors have PharmD, MD, or PhD degrees, and the medical content sections are well written. The authors' qualifications for the social and ethical sections are not as clear.

Usability: This handbook is suitable as an introduction to the major issues in women's reproductive health, and although the discussions are not exhaustive, students will gain an introduction to the language and topics in the field.

Highlights: The medical sections are good summaries of the major topics in the reproductive health care of women and include many useful tables. The book is an effective introduction to the topic of women's health for the student through mid-level health-care provider.

Limitations: Overall, the book provides a useful basic introduction to topics but is not exhaustive on any particular topic. One limitation is that references are not listed; instead, the reader is referred to a Web site, making cross checking of information challenging. The lack of references at the end of each chapter limits the student who would like to pursue a topic in more depth. Discussions of historical, legal, ethical, and religious content are limited in their breadth to a classical feminist approach, and thus the perspective in these chapters is somewhat narrow. For example, page 9 includes a discussion on maternal mortality decline: "The period between 1935 and 1956 saw one of the steepest declines in maternal mortality rates..." Then, later in the same paragraph, the text attributes that decline among other things to "legalization of induced abortion," which did not occur until 1973. Also, the discussions on ethical dilemmas and decision-making include feminist perspectives but do not discuss Hippocratic principles, a major oversight since Hippocratic principles have been the major undergirding of the health profession for millennia. Also, the issue of right of conscience of health-care providers is discussed in a limited way. However, if the reader is aware of this perspective, the book serves as a useful introduction.

Comparison with Other Related Books: This book compares favorably with existing books designed for the nursing or pharmacy student in that its medical sections are well written and include up-to-date information that is written in an understandable fashion.

Reviewer's Summary: Overall, this book contains a basic introduction to topics in women's reproductive health. The medical sections are well written and broadly representative. The historical, social, legal, and ethical sections are limited to a predominantly feminist perspective.

Footnotes

Conflict of interest: Author reported none

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Women's Health across the Lifespan: A Pharmacotherapeutic Approach

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Women's Health across the Lifespan: A Pharmacotherapeutic Approach was developed as a comprehensive resource on the health care needs of women throughout their life stages. The book also addresses the influence of sex on pharmacokinetics and response to drug therapy. Broader issues affecting health are also discussed, such as psychosocial, ethical, and racial issues.

The book is organized into 8 sections: historical and social context; biology and physiology; menstrual health; contraception; preconception, pregnancy, and postpartum care; chronic illnesses that affect women differently than they affect men; cancers; and ethical issues. Each chapter has a standard template, covering epidemiology, clinical presentation, pathophysiology, guidelines, and treatment. Information on complementary and alternative medicine is interspersed throughout the book, where appropriate.

The chapters are well organized and easy to follow, with clear headings. Objectives are presented at the beginning of each chapter to help readers assess their learning. Each chapter also includes a case to highlight concepts in practice, with background information appearing at the beginning of the chapter, and the assessment and treatment plan at the end. These cases are practical tools for applying the chapter content. The various authors also make good use of tables and flow charts to present important content. Additional information, such as other tables, figures, and practice cases, are available online.

The "Therapeutic Challenge" questions represent another helpful feature of this book. Each of these questions addresses a controversial issue in women's health, and the questions are intended to spur discussion or investigation into the topic. They could be used as teaching strategies to promote critical thinking to students, residents, or new practitioners. Unfortunately, there is no discussion related to the answers to these Therapeutic Challenge questions. Advanced practitioners using the book as a quick reference to help with more complex problems will need to access other resources for this information.

The nearly 120 contributors include a range of pharmacists, physicians, and other health care professionals. The chapter content is well referenced. However, because of space limitations, the references are not included in the print version but rather are available online. Some readers may find this inconvenient; however, it has benefits because references are hyperlinked to PubMed citations when possible.

This is one of the most comprehensive books I have seen on the topic of women's health. With its pharmacotherapeutic approach, it is definitely targeted to pharmacists; however, it

would be a useful resource for any health care professional. The book is written for practitioners in the United States, as reflected in the primarily US brands and the use of non-SI units, but the therapeutic content is applicable to Canada.

For the most part the chapters are very thorough. Unfortunately, there was some inconsistency among chapters, especially with regard to discussion of guidelines. For example, the menopause chapter makes little mention of position statements from organizations such as the North American Menopause Society, whereas other chapters have more discussion of guidelines. In addition, I found that some of the tables were missing information. For example, the table of hormone therapy products does not list micronized progesterone, although this product is discussed in the text.

In summary, this book is a unique compilation of issues relevant to the whole continuum of women's health. The editors should be applauded for their holistic approach, which goes beyond pathophysiology to consider other factors that influence women's health, such as culture, gender differences, environmental factors, and health care access. Pharmacists practising in women's health will find this book an excellent reference, especially for a quick review of topics beyond their area of expertise or for teaching purposes.

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