A Dictionary of Pharmacology and Clinical Drug Evaluation

Edited by D. R. Laurence & J. Carpenter
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This dictionary covers an extensive range of topics, including areas as diverse as ethics, statistics and
tea (Chinese Amoy dialect t’e; Mandarin dialect ch’a; Eng. slang char) Fermented and dried leaves or buds of the plant Camellia thea. Contains caffeine.

It is aimed at a broad readership, from medical students to pharmacologists. Almost all the definitions they could possibly want are in this book, along with their etymology.

The outstanding feature of the book is its dry wit, for example

gargle – to exhale slowly and noisily through a volume of medicated liquid suspended in the throat, a peculiarly antisocial form of placebo therapy, except it can be practised in total privacy

Many observations on pharmacology, life and the universe in general

Laws (various) – Anon: if there is a 50:50 chance of it going wrong, it will go wrong nine times out of ten

define words which no-one in their right mind would look for in a dictionary of pharmacology, and serve only as light relief or distraction when seeking the word required. One is all the more likely to stumble upon these little gems because of the rather poor organisation of definitions. References rarely turn up where one expects to find them and cross-referencing is rife. Finding the word needed is possible though, given time, patience and a sense of humour!

The definition of each word is geared to the standard expected of the individual reader. The medical student may well be better informed after reading the entry for ‘Volume of Distribution’, and the professor would not feel his intelligence insulted should he choose to read the definition of the Cheng & Prusoff equation.

As a dictionary, the book can be used to find key information in a matter of a few minutes. The entries serve as a helpful reminder of concepts once known briefly but now forgotten. It cannot, however, replace a pharmacology text as terms and ideas are inevitably defined in isolation from their context.

The dictionary is a lot of fun, but on balance we would probably not queue up to buy it. For light reading it is a little bit heavy, and for heavy reading it is a little bit light.

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