

**PRACTICAL OBSTETRICS AND GYNAECOLOGY HANDBOOK
FOR THE GENERAL PRACTITIONER**

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Though it was more than a decade ago, I always remember how lost and ignorant I felt as an intern at a major obstetric unit in Brisbane. How I wished there was a user-friendly handbook around to tell us all about various antenatal investigations and their interpretations with one flip or glance. Years later, when I started working in primary care in Singapore as a Family Medicine trainee, I became acutely aware of my inadequacies in office gynaecology and hoped for the publication of a concise gynaecology handbook for quick referencing in the busy consultation room.

My wishes have now been fulfilled in the already widely-used “Practical Obstetrics and Gynaecology Handbook for the General Practitioner”, authored by three experienced obstetricians and gynaecologists from KK Women’s and Children’s Hospital (KKWCH). The book’s forerunner, a handbook on “Common Investigations in O&G” was originally produced to aid house officers and junior medical officers in making correct clinical decisions while caring for O&G patients in the ward. It turned out that the handbook was received with much enthusiasm and became a much-valued clinical tool for all officers going through their posting in O&G at KKWCH. As the handbook was further consolidated with clinical approaches and evidence-based updates, our learned colleagues at KKWCH saw the vision that this could be developed into something with a wider application and the book eventually evolved to become the current publication.

With 16 chapters on obstetrics and 34 chapters on gynaecology, of which five and six chapters are respectively dedicated to investigative tools in obstetrics and gynaecology, this handbook boasts a breadth that is comparable with that of most comprehensive O&G references, usually weighing more than a few kilogrammes and requiring mammoth efforts to locate any specific clinical information. Yet the “Practical Obstetrics and Gynaecology Handbook for the General Practitioner” weighs just a little more than 400 g and makes quick referencing during busy primary care consults possible, with a user-friendly format consisting mainly of bullet points, tables and flowcharts. The content has also been tailor-written for practical, day-to-day use by busy family physicians as it contains only the essential clinical information, like significant symptoms and signs, office treatment relevant to family practice and, very importantly, when referral to O&G is warranted. To my delight, the authors have also introduced some information boxes on how to communicate with patients on specific issues. In chapter 24, a guide is found on how to explain colposcopy to the patients before referring them for the procedure, and chapter 42 gives a useful list of screening questions to help the practitioner identify sexual dysfunction problems.

Besides the “bread and butter” topics commonly found in most O&G texts, the authors have included a few interesting and practical chapters which are very relevant to primary care practice. Among them are “Preconception Preparation” (Ch 1); “Skin Disorders in Pregnancy” (Ch 3); “Post-Abortion Care” (Ch 8); “FAQs on Pregnancy” (Ch 11); “Assessment of Osteoporosis” (Ch 39); and “Sexual Dysfunction Problems” (Ch 42). In particular, concerns over all the dos and don’ts before conception and during pregnancy are often raised in primary care consults and may present as a challenge to some of our colleagues who have not gone through an O&G posting and hence are less experienced in O&G matters. Chapters 1 and 11 are a useful resource for preconception and antenatal health tips, which are often not found in standard O&G texts. More and more young, educated couples are also approaching the family physicians for prenatal or even pre-nuptial screening, to ensure they are in an “optimal state” for procreation. As such, I would suggest the inclusion of an evidence-based approach to prenatal screening be considered for future editions.

Safe prescribing in pregnancy and lactation often poses a challenge to family physicians, as many of the medications commonly used in primary care belong to Category “B” or “C”, where the foetal risks of medication use in humans are unknown while in some cases adverse effects on the foetus have been demonstrated in animal studies. Chapter 10 provides a useful list of medications commonly prescribed in primary care that can be used safely in pregnancy or lactation for a variety of indications. I would suggest the list be expanded in future editions to include under each indication “medications that should never be used (Cat X)” as well as, when appropriate, “medications that should only be used in life-threatening situations or when no other safer alternative is available to treat a serious illness (Cat D)”.

The layout of the book is simple and yet inviting to readership, with appropriate use of concise bullet points, well-organised tables and self-explanatory flowcharts. The use of clean-lined pictograms to complement the chapter titles adds life and style to the simple layout. Coloured pictures have been included to illustrate skin disorders in pregnancy and cervical lesions, and the quality of pictures is commendable. I have also noticed there are ample vacant spaces in the book, usually at the end of the chapter, or below a table or flowchart. I would suggest these spaces be organised into text boxes for readers to enter their supplementary notes to customise the handbook for their individual clinical use.

As a book reviewer, I congratulate the authors, Dr Tan Thiam Chye, Dr Tan Kim Teng and A/Prof Tay Eng Hseon, for having penned this landmark publication on Obstetrics and Gynaecology, which will no doubt go down in history as one of the must-have, widely-read, Singapore-published medical references. As a family physician, I sincerely thank the authors for this much-needed office reference, which has been comprehensively compiled and thoughtfully edited for easy and practical use in primary care.

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