

Book Review: Clinical Naturopathy – An evidence-based guide to practice.

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This book is a standard 17½cm x 24½cm x 3½cm sized soft-cover book comprised of 891 pages, if one includes the content, foreword, preface and acknowledgements pages; it weighs in at just over 1½kg.

It is printed on good quality glossy paper and first impressions are that of a quality product.

When one browses through the book for the first time, there is a tendency to feel overwhelmed by the volume of information presented, but some closer scrutiny quickly brings the realisation that the book is laid out in a logical and easy to use format. Nevertheless, it is an ambitious book that attempts to cover an enormous amount of ground; aligning Naturopathy with modern scientific research is not easy task, as the roots of Naturopathy do not lie there, but rather in empirical ethnic medical traditions and unfortunately to some extent also with anecdotal and unproven approaches. Hence this book should be warmly welcomed as a genuine and what appears to be workable attempt to sift the wheat from the chaff.

Firstly, this is a book for practising naturopaths, or at least for the advanced Naturopathy student, as a good grounding in the foundation medical sciences is assumed from the onset. It may however also be of some interest to nurse practitioners and medical doctors who desire to utilise an integrative approach in their practice. Certainly, the extensive list of references at the end of each section tends to inspire confidence in the usefulness of the information presented.

The book contains three distinct parts: part A that deals with naturopathic case taking and diagnostics, this spans approximately 45 pages; parts B, C, D and E take up the bulk of the book, around 700 pages, these describe common clinical conditions and their treatment approaches; and part F, which is composed of a total of 90 pages that contains the appendices, which consist of tables that list herb/drug interactions, botanical and common herb names, laboratory values, and a wealth of other information. This latter part also has a section on the principles of Chinese medicine, which is a nice addition rarely found in books of this nature.

The largest section that deals with the treatment of clinical conditions (parts B, C, D and E), covers 35 separate conditions in all. Subjects covered for each condition are: 1. Aetiology; 2. Risk Factors; 3. Conventional (medical) treatment; 4. Key treatment protocols, which brings together a number of possible treatments by other medical disciplines; 5. Case study, which includes an explanation and rationale of the treatment approach used; and 6. a table that compares the different treatment options together with the evidence of their efficacy.

Naturally one cannot do justice to the wealth of information contained in this volume in a short book review, and the authors must be complimented on the amount of care and research they have put into this book. It is somewhat paradoxical however, that this book sets new standards for naturopaths; it is no longer enough to finish a course of study and rest on one's laurels, ongoing research is essential for every naturopath as research by its very nature gets superseded and existing information is quickly replaced by new findings. This of course also applies to the information in this book.

In summary, the availability of a book like this, that brings together such a large amount of quality information on alternative and integrative medicine would have been unthinkable some years ago. As such I will find considerable and ongoing use for this book and it is unlikely to be left to gather dust on a bookshelf.

Of course it is not perfect, nothing ever is. For instance, I was rather perplexed as to why a naturopathic syndrome such as "adrenal exhaustion" was covered in the book, seeing there is absolutely no scientific evidence for its reality, but a similar one such as "candidiasis" was left out. In my mind it should, for the sake of completeness, either have been placed in a separate section that is dedicated to unproven conditions together with other similar syndromes, or should have been left out altogether. Equally, I also found a few questionable statements, for example, there is not a scrap of evidence that irritable bowel syndrome is caused by an imbalance in the intestinal flora.

But such issues are rare and very much the exception and I am really nit-picking here. All-in-all I consider this is a great book that every naturopath, and in fact every health professional that has an interest in alternative and integrative medicine, should own.