Andrew G. Lee and Paul W. Brazis
Clinical Pathways in Neuro-Ophthalmology. An evidence-based approach
Thieme, New York 1998
ISBN 3-13-108641-6
Pages: 398. Price: $69

The best clinical pathways in neuro-ophthalmology are sometimes difficult
to find and follow. Which ophthalmologist would not welcome a loyal path-
finder to avoid possible obstacles and dead ends? If it were designed as a
computer algorithm scheme, attempting to imitate the crisp logic of a program-
ning language, would it not be appealing? IF a THEN DO b UNLESS c. Of
course it would.

This is the approach the authors have taken to a number of common topics in
neuro-ophthalmology. I have a feeling that the authors realized underway that
clinical medicine does not easily lend itself to such exercises. For example, their
suggestion that IF you have a case of compressive optic neuropathy THEN DO
magnetic resonance imaging may serve as an illustration of the difficulties one may
encounter. How do I know it is compressive in the first place? The authors also
have aimed at providing complete lists of every possible differential diagnosis. Ob-
viously, this approach necessitates a very long lists of options and the pathway that
is most easy to follow may sometimes be obscured. One way to improve the de-
cision making process would be to intro-
duce a weighting algorithm, taking into
account the prevalence of a specific dis-
ease in the population. That is probably
the way computers would do it if com-
puters were doctors. That is also how
good clinicians do it. However, the
authors leave us out in the cold with 20,
50, or 100 alternative diagnoses, some
commonplace and some exceptional, and
without much guidance as to the selec-
tion between them. As an admittedly ex-
treme example, the authors devote one
paragraph to a condition described in
one patient in the world literature (parox-
symal superior rectus and levator palpe-
brae spasm).

This leads me to comment on the evi-
dence-based approach. The computer-al-
gorithm-type of presentation has of
course nothing to do with quality of in-
formation – as every programmer knows
all too well it is easy to get the computer
to do the most stupid things. Therefore,
the term evidence-based must refer not to
the decision making process itself but to
the relevance of the underlying infor-
mation. The extensive lists of differential
diagnoses cannot be considered as evi-
dence-based; some reports are anecdotal,
others are questionable and one or two
maybe just contain plain rubbish.

Having said all this, this book has
many positive features. The book is not
a general neuro-ophthalmology textbook
but it covers several important topics in
depth and in an up-to-date fashion. The
text is well written and easy to follow (al-
though at least I am better off without
the computer decision making schemes).

The reference lists are extensive although
readers who believe that important
knowledge was gained before 1966 (and
not readily available in medical, English-
language databases) have to look else-
where.

There is a scarcity of such practical,
clinically oriented type of textbooks and
I believe it has a place in the library of
every ophthalmology department. I am
sure many ophthalmologists will now and
then wish they had a copy at hand.

Bertil Lindblom

Philip Murray and Alistair Fielder
Pocket Book of Ophthalmology
Butterworth Heinemann, Oxford 1997
ISBN: 0-7506-2371-3

This is an absorbing little book of 112
pages, interesting for teacher sin ophthal-
mology and for students, although it
probably is most relevant in their first
years in this field. The ophthalmology is
cut into slices in a different way: After a
short introduction on applied anatomy
and physiology, the main section is titled
"Conditions" and describes in an al-
phabetical manner diseases and disorders
met with in clinical ophthalmology. Here
the reader gets very clear clinical infor-
mation and suggestions for treatment.
The final section is titled "Topics" and
tells you something about diagnosis, and
about vision optics and examination.

The teacher will get many good ideas
from this small volume, while the ophthal-
mologist in training will find a very clear,
well-arranged overview of ophthalm-
ology.

Niels Ehlers

O. J. Lehmann, D. H. Verity,
A. G. A. Coombes, F. G. Ah-Fat, P. J.
Francis and A. C. W. Ionides
Clinical Optics and Refraction
Butterworth Heinemann, Oxford 1998
ISBN: 0-7506-2188-5
Pages: 146. Price: £19.99

This book on clinical ophthalmic optics
approaches the subject by asking a large
number of questions with multiple choice
answers. Following each question there is
about half a page presenting some facts
and discussing the correct answer to the
question. This is a new way of presenting
the entire field, from which much can
clearly be learned. It might also be very
useful for teachers who have to prepare
examinations in ophthalmology. The
book can clearly be recommended to stu-
dents of ophthalmology.

Niels Ehlers