chapters on basic univariate/bivariate statistical methods, more advanced statistical methods (multivariable methods, sample size calculations, analyses of diagnostic and prognostic studies) and finally, the interpretation and publication of results. It is these last few chapters that are, to me at least, the most novel (even if the author is a little optimistic about the ease with which potential authorship disagreements might be resolved!). The layout of the book is clear – important definitions and/or statements are shown in unshaded boxes in the wide left-hand margin on each page and tips for the practical application of some of the techniques (rather reminiscent of the words of advice from a fortune cookie) are shown in shaded grey boxes, enabling the reader to identify the key points on a page at a quick glance. This feature, I imagine, will be particularly helpful for those cramming for exams who simply want to memorise a few key phrases. Additional references to more detailed texts are included as footnotes on each page. The chapters are, in general, fairly short and easy to digest, although Chapter 5 ('Bivariate statistics') is rather too long, taking up almost a third of the book, and could have been split into a series of shorter chapters. In practice, Chapter 6 ('Multivariable statistics') is probably far too short to be of any real use, reflecting the fact that the author has already published a book on this topic which the reader is encouraged to buy. I did feel slightly cheated by this – although this book is relatively cheap (at around £25 in paperback, £55 in hardback), it becomes less attractive if, halfway through your analyses, you find that you have to buy the second part of the series!

On the whole I enjoyed this book. The information was presented clearly and I found it easy to dip in and out of. The clinical examples helped to put the statistical methods into context. I did have a few minor gripes, however, that started to irritate after a while. In particular, the tips were not always as helpful as they could be, and some were even misleading when taken out of context. For example, on page 31, the reader is told 'when initiating prospective cohorts, bank serum and cells' without any mention of the major implications that this has for the cost and acceptability of the project and the additional ethical hurdles that this introduces. On page 19, the reader is told to 'use cross-over studies when you cannot recruit enough subjects to randomise subjects to different groups' – while this is certainly an added advantage of cross-over studies it is not, in itself, a reason to choose a cross-over study over a parallel trial design. Indeed, in many cases, it would be inappropriate to use a cross-over study because of the nature of the disease, its treatment or the possibility of carry-over effects, regardless of the available sample size. The terminology chosen is occasionally at odds with other texts on the subject, which may confuse readers who are switching between books. For example, in chapter 4, the author explains that he uses the term 'univariate' to refer to the analysis of a single variable, and the term 'bivariate' to refer to the relationship between two variables – this distinction is often not made in other texts, where both types of analyses are generally referred to as 'univariate'. Finally, there were times when the examples given were rather convoluted and simpler examples could have achieved the same aim (eg the discussion of confounding on pages 120–1).

These are fairly minor issues, however, and, as long as readers do not rely solely on the tips and key point boxes, then they are unlikely to go far wrong in their analyses. I have already recommended the book to statistical colleagues (as a good source of examples for teaching) and would certainly recommend it to clinical colleagues when they decide that my services are no longer needed!

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Evidence based physical diagnosis, 2nd edn

Steven McGee. Saunders, St Louis, MO 2007. 880 pp. £49.99.

What is the role of the physical examination in modern medicine? In an age where echocardiography, computed tomography and magnetic resonance imaging are readily available, it may appear to some that the ancient art of bedside clinical diagnosis is in danger of becoming a historical curiosity. The second edition of Steven McGee's *Evidence based physical diagnosis* should help to dispel this dangerous misconception.

The book begins with an introduction to some important concepts, such as pre-test probability and likelihood ratio. The reader is invited to consider clinical findings as analogous to diagnostic tests, each with their own sensitivity and specificity for detecting the clinical condition under investigation. The remainder of the volume consists of a thorough exposition of every conceivable clinical sign, together with its historical context, pathogenesis and, most importantly, its sensitivity and specificity for detecting the disease process in question. The book is meticulously referenced to well over 2,000 primary studies, making it an impressive scholarly achievement. It is unique in the medical literature in bringing together in one volume a wealth of fascinating and useful information on the subject of clinical examination, which could hitherto only be obtained, with difficulty, from numerous disparate sources. It is the only book to systematically present the sensitivity and specificity of the entire spectrum of clinical examination techniques. In addition, it is one of the few books to provide a comprehensive account of the pathogenesis of clinical signs, such as clubbing, pulsus paradoxus and Kussmaul's sign. It should be required reading for all aspiring MRCP(UK) candidates as well as clinicians of all levels.

The principle of parsimony dictates that what can be accomplished with simple means should be exhausted before pursuing more complex and costly alternatives. Clinical examination is cheap, non-invasive, and, in skilled hands, accurate. In the same way that every sea captain, despite the ubiquity of the global positioning system, has the ability to navigate by the stars if necessary, the art and science of bedside diagnosis must remain a fundamental skill of all practising clinicians. This book is a valuable addition to the literature on clinical examination, and the first one to fully explore its scientific basis.

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