



In Control: Making the Most of the Genetic Test for Breast Cancer

Neil Sharpe. 228 pp. Prentice Hall. 1997. \$19.95. ISBN 0-13-897968-5

Overall rating: Good
Strengths: Concise, easy reading; benefits and risks well described
Weaknesses: Not helpful for deciding appropriate therapeutic options if gene positive; need for research not emphasized
Audience: Women with a family history of breast cancer; family practitioners; oncologists

The discovery of the breast cancer genes BRCA1 and BRCA2 have been particularly momentous developments. A woman who harbours one or both of these genes is at a particularly high risk for developing breast cancer (56% to 85% lifetime risk). Testing for these genes is now available.

However, predictive genetic testing is a two-edged sword. Critics argue that it may be potentially harmful, causing anxiety, depression and dysfunction in some women.

Sharpe's book is a timely discourse on this complex subject. In an easy-to-read style, he discusses many of the issues from an experienced genetics counsellor's perspective. Using case scenarios, the dilemma that many women face when confronting this technology is personalized. The process of genetic testing and counselling is demystified, while acknowledging some of the obvious pitfalls. The book is oriented toward women who are considering genetic testing. Considerable efforts have been undertaken to help women prepare for the test and deal with the results.

Physicians will benefit from reading this book — particularly the section on benefits, risks and limitations of predictive testing. It provides help-

ful information and explains techniques that will enable doctors to discuss this topic openly, sensitively and knowledgeably with their patients.

One caveat — at the end of the day, a woman either tests negative (and may still be at risk of developing breast cancer) or she is found to be gene positive and has no proven options to "reduce" her risk. Sharpe acknowledges these scenarios; however, I was disappointed that the desperate need for ongoing research and clinical trials to help answer these questions was not given more importance.

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Surveying and Preventing the Complications of Diabetes in Nova Scotia

Diabetes Care Program of Nova Scotia (DCPNS); Complications of Diabetes Subcommittee. 80 pp. Illust. DCPNS, Halifax; 902 473-3219 (dcpns@istar.ca). 1997. \$26.75 (\$24.08, NS residents)

Overall rating: Good
Strengths: Concise, well organized, up-to-date; user-friendly charts
Weaknesses: Superficial treatment of pathophysiology
Audience: Primary care physicians; allied health professionals

Surveying and Preventing the Complications of Diabetes in Nova Scotia, by Dr. Meng-Hee Tan and collaborators, is a concise, well organized, user-friendly booklet directed at family physicians and other health care workers involved in the assessment and management of patients with diabetes.

The initial chapter deals with up-to-date targets, as defined by the

Canadian Diabetes Advisory Board, for glucose, glycated hemoglobin, lipids and blood pressure. Other chapters address management issues relating to complications of diabetes. Generally, each chapter contains a clinical description of the problem, discussion of the magnitude of the complication, risk factors, screening, intervention and management strategy, and then an evaluation of effectiveness. Discussion centres on effective management.

A real strength of this booklet is the flow-charts on management; they are clearly laid out and reveal, in an instant, the information needed to screen, manage and monitor the complications of diabetes. A bonus is the accompanying ring-bound, desk-sized, quick reference guide; it includes all the flow charts plus key information in an abridged form.

The booklet has some drawbacks. Designed for use in a busy clinical setting and not as a textbook, it lacks meaningful discussion on the pathophysiology of the complications of diabetes. The clinical studies, on which the evidence for management issues is based, are either addressed superficially or not at all. Discussions on therapy and management are often just summaries, with little information on drug dosages, side effects and pitfalls. The profound effect that pregnancy has on diabetic control and complications is dealt with in a cursory manner.

In spite of these issues, as a quick clinical aid, this booklet is a useful and practical guide for all health care personnel who deal with diabetes and its complications.

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