



Griffith's 5 Minute Clinical Consult CD-ROM

Williams and Wilkins Electronic, Hagerstown, Md./Canadian distributor, Login Brothers Canada, Winnipeg; 665-1148; fax 204 837-3116. US\$59.95, single user fee; US\$349

Overall rating:	Excellent
Strengths:	Fast, easy to use; covers over 1000 clinical problems seen in the outpatient department and GP's office; appropriate level of detail for use in a clinical setting; many high-quality images
Weaknesses:	Some recommended investigations and treatments reflect a US bias
Audience:	GPs, FPs, primary health care professionals
System requirements:	PC computer with 486 processor or higher running Windows 3.1/95 or higher (or any Macintosh computer running system 7.0 or higher), 2 MB hard disk space, CD-ROM drive, VGA graphics monitor (SVGA recommended).

Griffith's 5 Minute Clinical Consult CD-ROM (5MCC) is an excellent CD and ideal for the GP, family physician or nurse practitioner. It is easy to learn how to use, has a user-friendly interface, very fast search capabilities and contains over 1000 of the most common conditions seen in the outpatient department. Most importantly, it has the appropriate amount of information for use in a clinical setting (i.e., it can be used while seeing patients).

When 5MCC is loaded, the first screen is an alphabetical list of all the medical conditions contained on the CD. To find a condition, you can scroll through the list or use the Search function. To search, you type in key words and, in seconds, a number of matches appear on the screen. Next, you click on one of the matches and it takes you directly to that part of the text. Every medical condition

is divided into sections, specifically a basic introduction, diagnosis, treatment, medications and miscellaneous. Once you have found the condition you want, you can scroll through each section sequentially or go directly to a section by clicking on an icon.

There are a number of reasons why I liked 5MCC. First, it is easy to use. If you can use a mouse, you can use this CD. The search time is fast; it only takes seconds to find the information you need. If the CD is loaded and running, it is faster to use the computer than to look up the information in a textbook. During a busy clinic, the ability to access information quickly is extremely valuable. This CD contains most of the conditions I see in family practice or in the outpatient department. Best of all, it tells me, in just the right amount of detail, what I need to know about the condition, how to diagnosis it, what investigations need to be done, and how to treat and manage it. The level of detail is similar to *The Merck Manual*.

Griffith's 5MCC has a number of nice features. The Bookmark allows you to mark and return to areas you use frequently. A Notebook feature allows you to add your own comments. I have used this to add short case histories. Sticky Notes is similar; it allows you to place short comments anywhere in the text. I use this feature primarily for adding recommended drugs and dosages. Another useful feature is that you can print, copy and save to disk all information on the screen.

Griffith's 5MCC has no major weaknesses; however, a few minor improvements could be made. Even though the CD has a number of high-quality images, it would be nice to have more audiovisuals (e.g., video clips, sounds bytes, more pictures).

Some people may find that the amount of detail is not enough, especially regarding pathophysiology. Finally, like most US CDs, the recommended investigations and treatments are sometimes different from what would be recommended in Canada. For example, more investigations are recommended than would be the norm in Canada, and often they are more expensive.

I used this CD-ROM for approximately 6 months while doing family practice, outpatient locums and emergency locums, and it has become my favourite clinical CD. I highly recommend it for primary care health professionals.

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The New Healers: The Promise and Problems of Molecular Medicine in the Twenty-First Century

William R. Clark. 245 pp. Illust. Oxford University Press. 1997. \$40.95. ISBN 0-19-511730-1

Overall rating:	Fair
Strengths:	Comparatively up-to-date overview
Weaknesses:	Occasional turgidity and technical errors
Audience:	Lay public, all health care workers with limited knowledge of molecular biology

We currently bear witness to an unprecedented and explosive growth in the comprehension of our species' molecular architecture; how



we are strung together, how the body works in health and what precisely goes awry in disease. We have learned more in this regard in the past 15 years than we have in all preceding time. Moreover, this statement will likely remain true for the foreseeable future.

It is in this dramatic setting that we find *The New Healers: The Promise and Problems of Molecular Medicine in the Twenty-First Century*, immunologist William Clark's critique of the embryonic science of gene therapy encapsulating the past 50 years work that has brought us to this pass. Clearly this is heady stuff; the promise of molecular medicine is limited only by our imagination. With the intimate knowledge of a myriad of molecular pathologies come opportunities to either treat by effectively correcting the newly ascertained biochemical defect or, in the case of genetic disorders, even cure by placing nonmutated versions of the offending gene in the appropriate tissue(s). This view plus other feats such as the recent cloning of entire organisms fuel the excitement underlying the field. Despite the general hue and cry, however, gene therapy is not yet, and may not any time soon prove to be, an effective therapeutic approach. Thus, while it would have been satisfying had Clark been able to enumerate the significant success of the approach, he has to content himself with relating the modest advances seen in disorders such as the exceedingly rare severe combined immune deficiency.

A second weakness of the book develops from a fundamental dichotomy; notwithstanding its promise, the science of molecular biology itself can be mind numbing in its technical detail. And so it is with the book; while the blue sky vision of all that is possible is compelling, the technical explanations of the various approaches, such as the physical mapping of the human genome, do little

to quicken the pulse (to paraphrase: in these sections, once you put the book down; it's hard to pick up). Elsewhere, especially when historical events are covered, the story succeeds despite Clark's workmanlike writing style; the inherent drama of Watson and Crick's groundbreaking DNA structure elucidation as well as the elegance of much of the seminal work in the '50s and '60s are particularly engaging.

Clark is clearly no molecular biologist, if the number of errors in the book is any indication. These errors include a surprising and fundamental misapprehension of the polymerase chain reaction methodology (and fragile X is not, as suggested, caused by an insertion of a poly-arginine tract into the fraX protein). Nonetheless, although only intermittently absorbing, the work represents a useful and, given the speed with which the science is moving, surprisingly up-to-date overview of a dynamic new field destined to reshape clinical medicine as we know it today.

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Books and other media received

Livres et autres documents reçus

Anesthesia

Mechanical Ventilation Manual. Edited by S. Raoof, F.A. Khan. 187 pp. Illust. American College of Physicians-American Society of Internal Medicine, Philadelphia. 1998. US\$40. ISBN 0-943126-57-6

Books for patients

Wired for Sound: a Journey Into Hearing. Beverly Biderman. 240 pp. Illust. Trifolium Books Inc., Toronto. 1998. \$24.95. ISBN 1-895579-32-5

Cardiology

Cardiology 1998. Edited by J.T. Willerson, W.C. Roberts, C.E. Rackley, T.P. Graham, Jr., D.T. Mason, W.W. Parmley. 611 pp. Illust. Futura Publishing, Armonk, NY. 1998. US\$98. ISBN 0-87993-405-0

Clinical medicine

ABC of Palliative Care. Edited by M. Fallon, W. O'Neill. 68 pp. Illust. BMJ Books. 1998. ISBN 0-7279-0793-X

Genetics

Human Cloning. Edited by James M. Humber, Robert F. Almeder. 214 pp. *Bio-medical Ethics Reviews Series.* Humana Press. 1998. US\$44.50. ISBN 0-89603-565-4

Internal medicine

Allergy and Allergic Diseases: the New Mechanisms and Therapeutics. Edited by Judah A. Denburg. 591 pp. Illust. Humana Press, Totowa, NJ. 1998. US\$145. ISBN 0-89603-404-6

Medical education

Non-Standard Medical Electives in the U.S. and Canada, 1998-1999. K.V. Iserson. 260 pp. Galen Press, Tucson, Ariz. 1998. US\$31.95. ISBN 1-883620-00-7

Neurology

Alzheimer's Disease: Activity-Focused Care. 2nd ed. C.R. Hellen. 436 pp. Butterworth-Heinemann. 1998. US\$37.50. ISBN 0-7506-9908-6

Occupational medicine

The Athletic Musician: a Guide to Playing Without Pain. Barbara Paull, Christine Harrison. 175 pp. Illust. The Scarecrow Press, Lanham, Md. 1997. US\$27. ISBN 0-8108-3356-5

Preventive medicine

Public Health and Preventive Medicine in Canada. 4th ed. Chandrakant P. Shah. 512 pp. Illust. Printed for Dr. Shah by the University of Toronto Press in support of the University's Scholarly Publishing Programme (c.shah@utoronto.ca). 1998. \$44.95. ISBN 0-9694044-3-3 [Also available under the title *Médecine préventive et santé publique au Canada*, published by Les Presses de l'Université Laval.]