BOOK REVIEW


Occasionally one experiences the awful awareness of gaps in one's knowledge or training that make some subjects too intimidating to tackle. Agreeing to review the book Evidence-Based Practice of Transfusion Medicine meant I had to tackle one of those areas.

To quote the author, "Evidence-based medicine requires the user to select the best of relevant studies and while noting their strengths and weaknesses, extract the clinical message in order to solve specific patient problems." The intent of this book is to present the rationale of clinical research methods to those readers who may well understand laboratory research methods but are less able to undertake a critical analysis of clinical research reports.

The author appears well aware that blood bankers often lack training in this area. He begins the book with three introductory chapters on basic concepts such as measurement of disease occurrence and association, then moves on to research designs, role of chance and bias, statistical hypothesis testing, and the meaning of sensitivity and specificity.

One of the strengths of this book is its single author who, in each chapter, discusses the research behind such controversial topics as the risk of transfusion-transmitted viral infections, current issues in transfusion-transmitted hepatitis C, the potential for transfusion transmission of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD) and variant CJD, cost-effectiveness of autologous donation, trends in the blood supply, and the confusing issue of immune modulation as it relates to universal leuko-reduction. Each chapter reviews these issues logically, notes what studies should be done to provide a scientifically based policy decision, and provides extensive references.

One of the most challenging but rewarding chapters is on meta-analysis in transfusion medicine. As the author points out, such analysis will be used to formulate policy guidelines and if used properly can "use statistics to clarify not obfuscate," a quote from a journal article by Goodman, Have you ever met a meta-analysis you didn't like? Ann Intern Med 1991;114:244-6.

This book should be helpful to many and should be used by educators to improve training in statistical analysis of clinical research. If it is updated periodically it will be a most useful source of in-depth reviews on controversial topics.

Ruth Mougay, MT(ASCP)SBB
1705 Highland Avenue
Carrollton, KY 41008

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