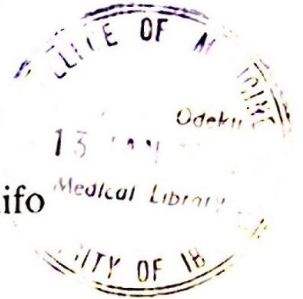


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## Book review

# An Introduction to Clinical Diagnosis in the Tropics

A. O. Falase. Baillière Tindall, London, 1987.  
184 pp. NGN23.00.

The recent explosion of interest in tropical diseases especially by bodies such as the World Health Organization and the Wellcome Trust is hardly matched by the availability of basic clinical textbooks targeted at the practitioner 'on the spot'. Hence this slim, elegant and well-illustrated textbook which goes a long way towards realizing the objective so well enunciated by the author that 'I have long felt a need for more books that reflect the realities of clinical practice in the tropics'.

The book is written in 10 chapters. Two unique chapters that all practitioners who desire a successful practice in the tropics should read many times are (i) 'Medicine in the tropics' which provides a useful 'non-medical' background to the myriad socio-political and economic problems that influence health planning, execution and management in the tropics and, (ii) 'The sequential steps to rational diagnosis' which distills information so lucidly put in the didactic chapters on history taking, physical examination and pathophysiology and clinical manifestations of the various disorders affecting the different organ systems. Indeed, Chapter 4 on 'Symptoms and signs in various systems' accomplishes in just about 100 pages what is more than adequate for the undergraduate (and certainly enough for the postgraduate) physician to know in everyday practice, and also satisfies the requirements for professional examinations. The sheer brevity, simplicity, profuseness of clear illustrations and lucidity of the chapter will ensure that the book is read very many times, not only by medical personnel but additionally by the more inquisitive nurse and paramedical practitioner.

The author concedes that fever is probably the most important mode of presentation of disease in the tropics. As is generally recognized, fever in these circumstances is usually due to infections and/or infestations, many of

which have disappeared from temperate countries since the turn of the century. Consequently, inadequate attention is given to the recognition and treatment of these 'so-called' exotic fevers in most books on clinical medicine. This is the likely reason why the author devoted a whole chapter to 'The febrile patient', an approach which is not only apt but additionally catalogues the tropical fevers seen in everyday practice.

Any practitioner reading this very useful chapter on fevers should complement any new knowledge acquired with the information available in the chapter on 'The clinical sideroom laboratory'. It is too well known that few hospitals in tropical countries can boast of the sophisticated laboratory equipment for the elaborate diagnosis of even the more common infectious disorders. What is usually required is the crude identification of the infective agent rather than elaborate species recognition and/or typing. In any case, most of the patients seen at the primary health care level lack either the wealth or the inclination to attend the big urban hospitals although they easily account for at least 90% of all patients seen in all health institutions in the tropics. The newly qualified doctor and even the more experienced urban-based doctor must therefore be able to quickly perform simple sideroom tests and continually update his knowledge on these procedures in order to be confident in diagnosing the more common tropical disorders such as malaria and sickle cell disease and expediting appropriate treatment. This chapter is written in non-technical language and anybody with a basic knowledge of pathology should very easily comprehend the methodology of the various procedures, especially as only the simplest of laboratory hardware and consumables are required.

Are there any defects in this book? Yes,

but they are relatively minor. More illustrations, especially of classical cases of the commoner non-infective tropical disorders such as Burkitt's tumour, endomyocardial fibrosis and sickle cell disease might have considerably illuminated the discussions on the recognition of those disorders, although cost implications would also have to be considered. Photographs of pathological specimens and typical radiographic appearances, illustrating, for example, vesical schistosomiasis with hydronephrosis, avascular necrosis of femoral head due to haemoglobinopathy, calcific pancreatic diabetes mellitus and giant goitres with pharyngeal obstruction would convey to the non-tropical practitioner the dimensions of the problems of late presentation of even fairly simple disorders in the tropics. A section on ECG peculiarities in the African might also inform the Caucasian doctor newly posted to Africa that many ECG variants are purely physiological and do not connote an abnormal prevalence of ischaemic

heart disease. Nevertheless, these are only minor observations which in no way detract from the immense value of this useful text and which might be considered when a second edition is due.

All in all, the book is well written and suitable for medical students and practising doctors alike. At a most reasonable price of only NGN23.00 it is easily affordable by anybody even in these economically trying times. It is a book that should adorn the shelves of all doctors practising in, or planning to practise in tropical countries. For medical students, there is an added bonus in that the book contains numerous tips, hitherto dropped only during ward clinical demonstrations by the author (an experienced university teacher and administrator) but very frequently asked in the final MB examinations.

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## Announcement

The Pan-African Society of Cardiology (PASCAR) will hold its fourth congress and tenth anniversary between April 2 and 6 1991.

**Theme:**

Preventive Cardiology in Africa.

**Venue:**

Africa Hall  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

**Call for abstracts:**

*Deadline:* October 31 1990.

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