BOOK REVIEW

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‘Feeding the preterm infant: a practical handbook’ truly fulfills its purpose for a quick reference in the NICU for trainees and specialists in paediatrics and neonatology. It covers all essential aspects of managing nutrition in preterm infants from the time of admission to the time of discharge. The chief author and editor of the book, Fook Choe Cheah is a Professor of Paediatrics (Neonatology) at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Medical Centre who obtained his PhD at the University of Otago and has published extensively in peer-reviewed journals. The other co-authors, Girish Deshpande and Sanjay Patole are neonatologists in Australia whilst Juin Lee and Le-Ye Lee are neonatologists in Singapore.

Survival rates for preterm infants all over the world have improved in the past decades. This is also happening in Asia where NICUs are now better equipped and neonatal staff are better trained to look after extremely low birth weight and the very low birth weight infants. Nutrition in the postnatal period plays a key role in the long-term outcome of these infants. There are several renowned nutrition textbooks published in recent years but none has been published with an Asian context taking into consideration of the local cultures, beliefs and religious practices. So this book by Fook Choe Cheah bridges the gap between the research findings in the western world and the application in the Asian context.

Having an easy to read handbook in a busy NICU is a bonus. This book is also available as an eBook and any person using it will be able to access it from the smartphones or tablets. This book is particularly relevant to users in Asia in view of the local applications included in the book.

The book takes the readers through the feeding regime the moment a preterm infant is admitted to the NICU until discharge and thereafter. What I find useful and to the readers too, are the boxes of ‘What is known on this topic?’ and ‘What this chapter adds?’ at the beginning of each chapter and ‘Key points summary’ at the end of the chapters. These provide an insight of what to expect from each chapter and the key take home messages.

The first chapter highlights the importance of starting nutrition immediately after birth with the parenteral form until the infant can start enteral feeding and coined as a ‘nutritional emergency intervention’ by the author. The chapter also provides suggestions of overcoming limitation of full parenteral nutrition in resource poor settings. A chapter on enteral feeding immediately follows this chapter where the readers are reminded to feed ill infants early. Milk choice and algorithms of feeding are provided for various risk groups. I feel this is helpful for a quick reference to benchmark if one is going down the right pathway.
The next chapter is dedicated totally to breastfeeding and some of the shortfalls of this in preterm infants. As more and more hospitals in Asia are attaining the ‘Baby Friendly’ status, this will be very relevant to medical practitioners as more parents wish to exclusively breast feed their babies. A practical tip on bedside analysis of breast milk is highlighted in the chapter and this then allows the neonatologist to customise the fortification of the breast milk, so called ‘individualised fortification’ by the author. The next 2 chapters alerts the readers to remember to monitor and act on stable preterm infants’ growth rate as well as dealing with growth retarded infants who may have a whole set of other problems.

There is also a chapter on the use of pre and pro-biotics in the Asian context. This is pertinent to practicing neonatologists as more and more parents in Asia are using probiotics. Many do not know the specific indications of its use and the contraindications. In preparation for this book, the author has performed a survey of local neonatologists in the region on influences of cultural beliefs on breastfeeding practices. Interesting findings unique to the region are revealed in the book and the author hopes based on these, researchers may take on the task to do further studies to overcome these limitations.

In the final chapter of this book, there are 10 real life case studies collected from NICUs in the author’s unit and Singapore. Questions are posed to the readers as what they would do in several stages of treatment. This is quite a test for the readers, as the readers would need to have some basic knowledge to discuss the management plans for the cases. The answers are provided in the second half of the chapter, which allows the readers to decide if they agree with the management plans. I would strongly encourage readers who are preparing for their postgraduate examinations, to attempt these case studies, as they may also be useful for the viva examination.

In summary, I find this handbook a very easy reading of a very difficult subject and handle many of the dilemmas that a practicing neonatologist face. This should be available in hard copy in NICU and as an eBook in smart phones and tablets of all Asian NICU doctors.