Heart Failure Management
Norman Sharpe, ed

Heart Failure Management stands out from other books of its kind. It has a welcome freshness. One’s attention is immediately caught by the abstract cover painting, which symbolizes not only a “deep feeling of sickness” but also “the modern molecular-cellular paradigm of heart failure.” The book is edited by Norman Sharpe, Professor and Head of the Department of Medicine at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. Its goal is to present an up-to-date, concise, and practical guide to the evidence-based management of heart failure. To achieve this goal, Dr Sharpe gathered an international panel of experts who focused exclusively on the pragmatic medical management of this disease. Despite its multinational authorship, the resulting book is a cohesive, consistent volume that avoids repetition and discrepancy. The material is well-organized, and the chapters follow each other in a logical sequence.

Unlike its competitors, Heart Failure Management does not open by reviewing the pathophysiology of heart failure. Instead, the first chapter reviews the epidemiology of heart failure in the United States, Europe, and New Zealand, highlighting the disease’s prevalence, morbidity, mortality, and socioeconomic cost. The other 18 chapters cover general therapeutic principles, various pharmacological agents used in treating heart failure, special subgroups such as the elderly, heart failure after myocardial infarction, and acute and refractory forms of heart failure. The last chapter, which is a compendium of clinical trials, reviews heart failure studies reported between 1980 and 2000.

The chapter titles go beyond defining the subject matter; they also qualify it from the author’s viewpoint. Examples include “Epidemiological Perspective on Heart Failure: Common, Costly, Disabling, Deadly” (chapter 1) and “Inotropic Therapy: A Two-Edged Sword” (chapter 8). In general, each chapter is <15 pages long, is easily comprehended, and provides the busy reader with valuable condensed information. Moreover, each chapter concludes with a useful summary paragraph, comprising a few clear sentences that provide a practical, take-home message. The references and illustrations are generous throughout. The illustrations consist mainly of tables and graphs that complement the text and are printed in a highly legible, attractive format.

The book does not aim to discuss all aspects of heart failure management. For instance, cardiac transplantation and implantable mechanical assist devices are presented in only a few sentences. Intra-aortic balloon pump counterpulsation and coronary revascularization are covered in scarcely more detail. The main focus of the book is clearly the medical management of heart failure and the socioeconomic cost and challenge of this disease. The pharmacological material should be especially useful. Nevertheless, the section on new drug treatments is quite brief, providing only a quick glimpse of various promising agents.

In conclusion, this admirable book provides an excellent introduction to the optimal medical management of heart failure. However, it may not offer much new information to readers who are already experts in this field. Its primary readership will probably consist of medical students, interns, residents, nurses, and allied healthcare providers, as well as lay persons with an interest in heart failure. Although the book focuses on experience gained in the United States, Europe, and New Zealand/Australia, it has an international appeal and should be applicable throughout the world.

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Circulation. 2001;104:e65

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