
Anaesthesia at the district hospital

Second edition

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Preface to the second edition

Response to the first edition of this book published by WHO in 1988 has been extremely good. In the years since it was written, positive feedback has come from readers, journal reviews, and WHO workshops. Changes in availability of equipment and drugs, together with changes in emphasis in clinical practice, make a new edition necessary — particularly since the book is aimed primarily at non-specialist anaesthetists who may not have access to other means of keeping up to date.

Most of the original wonderfully clear line drawings have been retained, and a few more have been added. There is a revised and expanded chapter on fundamental skills, with further advice on airway safety and inclusion of the widely used Glasgow Coma Scale for assessment of patients with head injuries. Resuscitation guidelines have been updated in accordance with the latest recommendations for advanced life support. Increased awareness of the risks as well as benefits of blood transfusions has brought a new stress on their safe and appropriate use in accordance with new WHO guidelines. The descriptions of anaesthetic equipment have been revised to fit more closely the range of equipment most likely to be found at the district hospital. A number of obsolete drugs have been removed, and appropriate alternatives described. Oxygen supplies, and a recommended Performance Standard for oxygen concentrators, are now the subject of a separate chapter. Control of acute pain is given increased emphasis, as is the need for good record-keeping and audit, which give even the most basic hospital the opportunity to review and improve results.

As with the first edition, the overall aim is to present anaesthesia and its related skills in terms that will most help hard-pressed practitioners in district hospitals worldwide to deal effectively and safely with the needs of surgical, severely injured, and critically ill patients. Trained people are the most valuable resource in medicine — if this book helps to improve the level of training at this level it will have fully achieved its goal.

Michael Dobson

Preface to the first edition

This handbook is one of three¹ to be published by the World Health Organization for the guidance of doctors providing surgical and anaesthetic services in small district hospitals (hospitals of first referral) with limited access to specialist services. The advice offered has been deliberately restricted to procedures that may need to be carried out by a young doctor with limited experience in anaesthesia, surgery, or obstetrics, using the facilities that can reasonably be expected in such hospitals. Wherever possible, the drugs, equipment, and radiodiagnostic and laboratory procedures described conform with WHO and UNICEF recommendations.

Although the handbooks contain detailed descriptions and illustrations, the advice they offer is no substitute for practical experience. The reader is expected to have been exposed to all the relevant techniques during undergraduate or early postgraduate education. When necessary the text indicates which patients should be referred for specialized care at a higher level, as it is important to developing health services that young doctors and their supervisors understand the limitations of practice at the district hospital.

It has, of course, been necessary to be selective in deciding what to include in the handbooks, but it is hoped that any important omissions will be revealed during field testing. WHO would also be pleased to receive comments and suggestions regarding the handbooks and experience with their use. Such comments would be of considerable value in the preparation of any future editions of the books. Finally, it is hoped that the handbooks will fulfil their purpose — to help doctors working at the front line of surgery throughout the world.

The three handbooks have been prepared in collaboration with the following organizations:

Christian Medical Commission
International College of Surgeons
International Council of Nurses
International Federation of Gynaecology and Obstetrics
International Federation of Surgical Colleges
International Society of Burn Injuries
International Society of Orthopaedic Surgery and Traumatology
League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
World Federation of Societies of Anaesthesiologists
World Orthopaedic Concern.

¹See *General surgery at the district hospital* (Geneva, World Health Organization, 1988) and *Surgery at the district hospital: obstetrics, gynaecology, orthopaedics, and traumatology* (Geneva, World Health Organization, 1991). See also *Rehabilitation surgery for deformities due to poliomyelitis: techniques for the district hospital* (Geneva, World Health Organization, 1993).

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