Review of Arrhythmia Essentials, 2nd Edition

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The second edition of Arrhythmia Essentials, published this time by Elsevier, is a concise, authoritative update on the topic of heart rhythm disorders. The target readership includes cardiologists, internists, nurses, and mid-level providers, as well as trainees in internal medicine and cardiology, who have a particular interest in learning more about arrhythmias. The book assumes that the reader has a basic understanding of cardiac anatomy and physiology, and has the ability to interpret basic electrocardiograms. In addition, the authors assume that the reader is familiar with the phases of the cardiac action potential and the Vaughan-Williams classification of antiarrhythmic drugs, both of which are referred to when discussing the mechanisms of arrhythmias and pharmacology. The book is not written for interventional electrophysiologists, who perform ablation procedures and device implants, but would be of interest to heart rhythm specialists who follow patients in a device clinic.

The book has several strengths. The first is the authorship. The writers are four senior, experienced electrophysiologists and heart rhythm specialists who have been actively involved in medical education and direct patient care for many years, giving rise to high-level content that is written in the language of electrophysiologists. Learning the language of a field is critical to optimal communication. The book avoids common jargon such as "AICD," and when less formal phrases such as "atrial kick" and defibrillator "can" are used, quotations are added. These experienced writers are also able to fill the book with several useful caveats and valuable discussions of special circumstances that are based on personal clinical experiences.

A second strength of the book is its easy readability. It comes in a relatively small, easy-to-hold, paperback format resembling a travel book. For easy localization, each chapter is denoted with page markings on the side of the book opposite the binding (although in my case these were a bit off the mark). Each book also comes with a code that permits access to an online electronic version. There are four basic types of content distributed throughout the book, including standard text that is written in practical language and unencumbered by references, decision-tree algorithms that provide stepwise approaches to the disorders and could serve independently as a deck of presentation slides, multiple tables that neatly summarize the highlights, and many figures that show examples of each arrhythmia. It is important when reading the book to review all of the content because there are some chapters in which there is considerable information in the tables that is not in the text. For example, in the chapter on ventricular arrhythmias the specific channels affected in patients with different types of long QT syndrome are mentioned only in the table.

A notable standout of the book is the enviable quality of the electrocardiograms (EKGs) and rhythm strips, with ample page space devoted to each figure. There are numerous examples of normal and abnormal rhythms, including paced rhythms and implantable defibrillator therapies, which must have taken many years for the authors to collect, but are somehow displayed with perfect contrast and background gridlines. The EKGs themselves are as beautiful as the rhythms.

This second edition has been completely updated with new information from the recent American and European practice guidelines on atrial fibrillation, supraventricular tachycardia, and ventricular tachycardia, as well as the appropriate use of guidelines on implantable defibrillators. The bulk of the book is organized into chapters on specific categories of bradycardias and tachycardias, but also includes a chapter on the evaluation of patients with symptoms suggestive of an arrhythmia, and chapters on pacing and implantable defibrillators. The chapter devoted to pacing includes excellent examples of paced rhythms demonstrating pacemaker-mediated tachycardia, under- and oversensing, loss of capture, etc. Many of the figures in this chapter on pacing include references to the first edition of the book, suggesting that all of the other figures in the book are original to this edition, although that seems unlikely. The latter portions of the book include a few special chapters on arrhythmias in athletes, and the use of medications in pregnancy. There is a large chapter near the end that lists medications commonly used in patients with arrhythmias in alphabetical order that is practical and updated. A large portion of this chapter, perhaps too much, is devoted to a detailed discussion of the nonvitamin K antagonist oral anticoagulants.

Areas of this second edition that could be improved upon in the next edition include updates that are missing or spotty at times. For example, there is mention of His-bundle pacing, a technique that is on the rise to avoid the mechanical dyssynchrony associated with right ventricular apical pacing, but it is only mentioned in the context of pacing for extreme first-degree atrioventricular block. Another example is continued mention of the use of vasopressin for the treatment of refractory pulseless ventricular arrhythmias, even though vasopressin has been removed from the Adult Cardiac Arrest Algorithm—2015 Update (Neumar RW, et al. Part 1: executive summary: 2015 American Heart Association Guidelines Update for Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation and Emergency Cardiovascular Care. Circulation. 2015;132 (Suppl 2):S315–S367).
Given the intended audience, an idea to consider for the next edition of this book would be to include pictures and radiographs of the various types of implantable pacemakers and defibrillators. As more of these devices are being implanted and encountered in clinical practice, and as their complexity increases, it is important for the audience targeted by this book to be able to identify and distinguish standard pacemakers and defibrillators, various types of leads, leadless pacemakers, subcutaneous defibrillators, implantable loop recorders, and cardiac resynchronization pacing devices.

Overall, this new edition of Arrhythmia Essentials is a well-written, concise, up-to-date, and smartly formatted book with elegant examples of abnormal heart rhythms that anyone with an interest in arrhythmias would find informative and enjoyable to read.

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