

Book Title: **Essentials of Clinical Methods in Paediatrics**

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Clinical Methods is an art and practice of making diagnosis in medicine. This has evolved over the ages. Since the ancient Greek times, this art has been in constant evolution, that what it is today is a culmination of the efforts of the earlier practitioners of medicine. The paradox of medical science is that it is an old and a dynamic one. The complexity of the human being drives the quest for better methods in the diagnosis of human illness. Prior to modern day medical practice, the study of medicine consisted of a period of apprenticeship in the service of a master. Hippocrates laid the foundation of modern medicine and practice with his medical school in the Greek island in the Aegean Sea where he taught medical ethics and methods.

The essence of clinical methods is to diagnose a disease using historical, physical and investigative tools. Many books have been and will still be written on the subject of clinical methods in medicine all in the direct attempt to inculcate in the pupil medical doctor the art of clinical diagnosis. In schools rooted in the British medical tradition the universal books on this subjects are: Symptoms and Signs of Clinical Medicine and Hutchison's Clinical Methods. These books have undergone various revisions; Hutchison's Clinical Methods has been in existence for more than 100 years. Therefore what is the need for another book on clinical methods in the tropics?

If it is accepted that clinical method is an art, it thus follows that different cultural groups will have different modes of expression of the same subject. The two main reasons for the Essentials of Clinical Methods in Paediatrics are namely; to fill the gap in the knowledge of clinical methods in paediatrics and bring to the fore the peculiar cultural orientation of paediatric practice in the tropics. The standard text books in clinical methods have often subsumed the paediatric subject as an appendage of internal medicine. Furthermore due to the historical antecedents of the medical schools in the tropics little regard was given to cultural and peculiar clinical entities in this region in the editorship of this book.

The Essentials of Clinical Methods in Paediatrics is a bold attempt by Dr. Egbuna Kunle Obidike to break from this mould. Will the book satisfy the need for a book on clinical methods for paediatricians who will practice in the developing world? In order to relate to the circumstances, there is a conscious attempt by the author to use the everyday lexicon to explain a technical subject. This will facilitate the understanding of the subject by the medical trainee. The author's so many years of experience has a strong bearing on the context of this book. This might be an appropriate approach in the present day medical

training, unlike what obtained in the past where medical education and texts are structured in the context of the experience of our expatriate teachers. It is therefore a challenge to other indigenous authors to adapt and innovate based on their own experiences. There were statements that appear pedantic which will surely generate considerable controversies as they seem to challenge and change age old hypotheses and methods. Controversies are welcome in medicine as they further help to clarify issues and improve medical knowledge. It is our hope that other medical authors will join issues with the author in order to clarify the facts which if left unchallenged will create confusion in the minds of the medical trainees. Although the work is attributed to one author it is indicated that there are contributing authors, which further lends credence and authority to the book.

This book is a 263 page text with 23 chapters which is divided into two parts on; history taking and physical examination. There are 54 pages of 10 chapters devoted to history taking. Each chapter is on the different aspects of history taking which makes it easy for the reader to relate sufficiently to issue being discussed. Within this section are highlighted areas, which although not so designated, the author tries to explain practical points in the relevant topic previously discussed. This is an innovative writing style in textbooks which is found more in review articles and will assist the reader to appreciate the issues further. Equally helpful to the reader are such anecdotal paragraphs aptly captioned; issues, problems and summary, where the author tries to elucidate more on the topics discussed in the preceding paragraphs.

As expected the section on physical examination is more voluminous consisting of 13 chapters in 197 pages. The arrangement and presentation style vary considerably from the preceding part. Introduction of such chapters as 'Striking Features' and 'Features of System Involvement' is used illustratively to assist the reader to conceptualise steps involved in articulating the nuances required in physical examination. In this part of the book, pictorial illustrations are used to assist the reader in understanding the techniques being described. The use of coloured photographs brings enormous life to the book, and was appropriately distributed in the chapters on general examination to the detriment of other chapters. The photographs were not sufficient in number to minimise the use of descriptive verbiage which sometimes made reading difficult. The unequal distribution and lack of sufficient illustrations, (graphic or pictorial) is highlighted in the chapter on skin and appendages and should be rectified in subsequent editions. It is not equally lacking in didactics, it covered

sufficient spheres of physical examination. The author devoted a sizeable number of pages to the chapter on central nervous system examination. In this chapter he explained in simple but clear terms the anatomy and pathology of this system which is often a nightmare to many medical trainees. For instance the often dizzying examination of the extrapyramidal system was fully explained. Included in the text is the classification of clinical encephalopathy in a graphic form, which is not found in most books of clinical methods.

It will be incomplete to review this book without commenting on the editorial style. The book is written in appreciable font size with sufficient spacing, which makes it reader friendly. However it was not easy to hold on to the book for a long time, for a 263 paged text, due to the writing and formatting style, coupled with repetition of texts which create a lack of flux. There is a glaring incongruity in the usage of case style, with a mix-up in the appropriate use of title or sentence case particularly where nouns and pronouns are used. The paragraph style is also not consistent for a book designated for a wide readership. The wrong caption of Fig 21.1 and the temperature range on page 1113 are examples of some of the minor editorial mistakes that hopefully will be corrected in future editions. Also the

term stadiometer and its use should be properly defined to avoid obfuscation and controversies. It will be recommended that in future editions a section on features of child abuse be included.

Did the book achieve its objective? It will be inappropriate to answer this question without regard to the set objective of the author, which is to fill the gap in the teaching and practice of clinical methods in tropical paediatrics. With this objective outline it will be easy to evaluate the content of this book. There is no doubt that the timing and need for this book is most apt, with the ever increasing number of medical students and the few resources (manpower and facilities) available to conduct appropriate training. It is our hope that the reader will capture the essence of this book as a companion to medical diagnostic methods, and not regard the book as the author advised as a replacement of bed side teaching. They are complimentary and that satisfies the objective.

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