

**General Practice, 3rd Edition****Professor John Murtagh**

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**General Practice Companion Handbook, 3rd Edition****Professor John Murtagh**

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*General Practice* was first published in 1994. It has since had many reprintings and the third edition has recently been released. It is accompanied by a pocket-sized *Companion Handbook* which covers the management of common conditions presenting in general practice.

Shortly before *General Practice* hit the bookshops I had moved to a full-time teaching position and I recall the senior medical students asking what textbook I would recommend for their general practice rotation and for the residency programme. My response at the time was that there was no one text that covered all of the issues relevant to general practice and that it would be almost impossible to write such a book. A few months later John Murtagh's textbook pretty well achieved the almost impossible. My first impression of *General Practice* was that it was quite prescriptive and might discourage learners from problem-solving and deduction. However, the more I worked with students, the more I realised that what they wanted was a sound diagnostic strategy, which helped to prevent them missing serious illness, coupled with advice about what to do. The best way to achieve this is to learn from a wise and experienced general practitioner and to combine this wisdom with the best possible evidence relevant to the problems that present in primary care. Unfortunately, the latter is still extremely limited. However, John Murtagh has widely called on both of these resources to cover the assessment and management of the broad

range of conditions that present to the primary care generalist.

It is an easy textbook to use, with the topics presented alphabetically as symptoms rather than diagnoses. This does mean that finding information on the management of some conditions may take a little searching. For example, the treatment of heart failure is in the chapter on dyspnoea but the index is comprehensive and quickly leads a reader to the appropriate section.

My main quibble with the *Companion Handbook* is that it does not cover the management of accidents and acute trauma, which is what I would most want to be carrying in my pocket. This is obviously a space issue as it is well covered in the textbook, but I feel that trauma would be more useful in the pocketbook than some of the other material such as the section on interstitial lung diseases.

A number of the drugs mentioned are not available in New Zealand, at least not to GPs, but the book has not been written specifically for New Zealanders. However, the overall approach of the book is Australasian and I find that much more useful than most of the American and European texts that I have read.

This is not only a useful text for medical students and those doctors specialising in general practice but it also has a place on the bookshelf of experienced GPs.

*Tony Townsend*  
*Whangamata*