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Medical Response to Terrorism: Preparedness and Clinical Practice

Keyes DC, Burstein JL, Schwartz RB and Swienton RE, Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, 2005, 449 pages, hard cover, RRP \$A163.90, ISBN 0781749867. Distributed by Lippincott Williams & Wilkins Australia, Sydney, telephone: + 61 2 9212 5955 or website: <http://www.l-w.com.au>

'Medical response to terrorism: Preparedness and clinical practice' is well timed (in the wake of the attacks on London), with seemingly unbridled escalation in terrorist activity, heightened societal awareness, and fear of, attack. Such attacks pose serious health threats to whole communities, overwhelm health infrastructures and lead to fracturing of social, economic and political structures.

This excellent reference resource is of particular relevance to prehospital and ED health workers, who provide front-line medical response to victims of terrorist acts and are vulnerable to secondary harm from environmental contamination. The ED is the first point of arrival for those harmed by terrorist acts and will have the least time of any hospital care area to prepare for such surges.

Part one provides encyclopaedic coverage of terrorist acts in their various forms, including chemical, biological, biochemical, nuclear, radiation and explosive attacks. Part two covers preparation, planning and rehearsal necessary to improve the capability, capacity and readiness of emergency and medical systems to respond to inherently unpredictable terrorist attacks.

Section seven deals with prevention of health-care worker exposure to secondary contamination and contagion using personal protective equipment and decontamination, a particular hazard for emergency workers.

Book chapters have a logical flow and consistent structure with comprehensive references, starting with an absorbing account of the historical evolution of the agent, followed by chemical and kinetic characteristics, leading logically to clinical effects and manifestations, and culminating in patient management. Most chapters end with a descriptive summary slide and a list of web-based resources. I would have preferred diagnostic and treatment algorithms that provide useful, rapidly accessible and understandable clinical information rather than a set of multi-choice questions to complete each chapter.

This book provides a superb foundation upon which to base more practical, easy to use, site-specific disaster algorithms and protocols for each jurisdiction or health-care facility.

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