
REVIEWS

Miriam Orleans, Section Editor

Lasers in Health Care: Effectiveness, Cost-effectiveness and Policy Implications, David Banta and Inger Schou (eds.). Frederiksberg, Denmark: Academic Publishing, 1990, 351 pages, 49 ECU (55 ECU outside of Europe), postpaid. ISBN 87-982871-2-5.

Reviewed by: Richard Chrzanowski, M.D., Institut Suisse de la Santé Publique, Aarau, Switzerland.

This book on the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of a large variety of laser applications in clinical medicine is very timely. It is to the credit of the leaders of the European Community Concerted Action on Methodology of Economic Appraisal of Health Technology to have correctly identified the issues relating to the rapid spread of high-power lasers in medical practice. The international and multidisciplinary research team has successfully accomplished the difficult task of reviewing the current state of knowledge concerning technical and industrial advances in lasers.

Experts in specific clinical disciplines have given their opinions of the value of laser technology in the treatment of a broad range of pathological conditions in different organs. They are assisted by specialists in the evaluation of medical technology and particularly by economists for conclusions concerning the strength of evidence on the value of laser methods in clinical practice. The statements of the specialists are completed in certain critical places by the supplementary comments of the watchful and experienced editors, David Banta and Inger Schou.

The essential messages of the research team are clearly summarized in tables reflecting the consensus judgments of the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of laser applications. Thus one can see that most of the procedures have been classified as established by clinical experience, which means there are sufficient data in favor of the method but that no randomized controlled trials have been performed. Laser treatment of diabetic retinopathy represents the only laser application tested by RCT and proven to be cost-effective. Several indications for laser treatment in otolaryngology, gastroenterology, and urology are considered, on the basis of limited data, as “probably cost-effective.”

In addition to descriptions of the state of the art from clinical and economic viewpoints, the book also contains valuable remarks concerning the introduction of laser techniques in hospitals, the importance of educational programs, and the advantages of creating laser centers. There are well-documented examples of the diffusion of medical laser technology within several European countries including considerations of the industrial aspects. The last chapter contains recommendations concerning clinical re-

search, technology development, and policy implications. A glossary of terms, abundant references (nearly 900), and a guide to further reading complete the book.

The task of assessing medical laser applications provides an excellent example of the difficulties involved in "hitting a moving target." The team from the European Health Service Research Group has skillfully mastered this task. Their report is scientifically well founded but critical. The style is clear and the conclusions presented concisely. The book is useful for anyone involved in the medical application of lasers, be he clinician, health care planner, economist, administrator, or policymaker. Finally, the scientist will find many open questions and topics already defined for further research.

(This book is best obtained directly from the publisher at Hostrups Have 14, 1954 Frederiksberg C, Denmark; Fax +45-31-356322.)