

Rook/Wilkinson/Ebling Textbook of Dermatology (6th edition) on CD-ROM. Edited by R.H. Champion, J.L. Burton, D.A. Burns, and S.M. Breathnach. One CD-ROM contains the complete four volumes of the hardback version. Like the previous version it only runs on PCs within the Microsoft Windows environment. A Macintosh version is not available. The minimum technical requirements are Windows 95/98/NT, Pentium processor, 16 MB RAM, 16 bit display driver (800 × 600, 64000 colors), 10 MB hard disk space and a CD-ROM drive. Blackwell Science, Oxford. Price £295.00. ISBN 063 2049049.

CD-ROM versions of textbooks are becoming more and more prevalent. They offer sophisticated search capabilities, short retrieval time, instant information access, compact storage, and often the possibility of pasting and printing. Many dermatologists consider Rook/Wilkinson/Ebling as the most comprehensive textbook in clinical dermatology. The hardback version of the sixth edition has been available since June 1998, it comprises four large volumes and is priced at £395.00. The sixth edition contains three new chapters on epidemiology, molecular biology, and wound healing. The chapter on physical and surgical therapies has been divided into two separate chapters to reflect the development of techniques such as laser treatment and chemical peels. In December 1998 the CD-ROM edition of this textbook was released for the price of £295.00. It contains the content of all four volumes of the hardback version on one CD (3683 pages and 2000 illustrations).

A printed manual is lacking, but the CD-ROM version comes with a performant on-line help. The installation process is fast and user-friendly. Once installed, Microsoft Windows users will find the first surprise: Standard drop-down desktop menus have been replaced by icons, aligned on the left and right borders of the screen. Navigation through the CD is based on a search function and three different screens: a "section window", a "navigator window", and a "content window". The "section window" displays the list of chapters and the search results. The "navigator window" displays the contents of each of the chapters (section window) in a branching menu system. The "content window" displays the text. Though this concept resembles the previous edition, the new version is much more sophisticated,

elaborate, and user-friendly. The futuristic layout might be confusing at the beginning but, once the user gets familiar with this system, it offers fast and easy access to information.

The search function is comfortable and allows different search modalities such as full text search, etc.

The user can choose three different styles for viewing the text in the "content window" (white letters on black background, black letters on white background, etc.). References and figures are highlighted in the text and can be easily accessed by double clicking. Although the quality of on-screen images rarely matches the quality of printed photographs or slides, I was surprised by the quality of histologic and clinical images, which vary in resolution around 800 × 500 pixels but which all have 24 bits of color depth. They can easily be magnified by a simple double click on the image without an obvious loss of quality.

Text and references can easily be printed or copied to other applications (for presentations or teaching purposes). The copy function allows only the transfer of a limited amount of text (three lines).

Pictures can be printed but unfortunately not directly copied or exported.

The software was tested with a system fulfilling the minimum technical requirements and with a more powerful system (Pentium II Processor 266 Mhz, 128MB RAM, AGP graphic adapter with 8MB SDRAM, 32x CDRom drive).

In conclusion, for users with easy computer access and performant hardware equipment, this comprehensive package is a serious competitor to the paper version. The retrieval of information is easy and faster than with the textbook. The dermatologist can quickly browse a topic in office and ward settings and will find this CD practical, visually pleasing, and enjoyable to use. Even with the minimum technical requirements access to information is fast and user-friendly, and is obviously improved by more performant hardware. I would recommend the use of this software package for clinicians and researchers with an interest in the field of dermatology.

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