Principles of Pharmacology by H. L. Sharma and K. K. Sharma

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A good book is one which interests and guides a student even in the absence of a teacher. What does a student look for in a text book of pharmacology? Well, many things, but essentially the following:

1. A lucid, well-organized presentation that is easy to understand and remember, with emphasis on the understanding of concepts rather than a statement of facts.
2. Clear and apt illustrations that make complex topics easy to understand.
3. Exclusion of complex classifications and terminologies that are not of practical value and also “vaporize” rapidly from memory.
4. Up-to-date with respect to the current trends in pharmacotherapeutics.

On the other hand, teachers judge a book from its content, whether it emphasizes the learning objectives as laid down in the curriculum, its “originality” in terms of approach to the subject, its presentation, and the correctness of the information provided. Both groups of readers also look for “novelty” and “innovativeness.”

The textbook “Principles of Pharmacology” by H. L. Sharma and K. K. Sharma fulfills these and more. This text book on pharmacology is primarily targeted toward undergraduate medical students. To begin with, the topics included are contemporary and well classified. Special topics such as pediatrics and geriatric pharmacology and pharmacology of radioccontrast media and drug schedules have been included. The strength of this book lies in the detailed yet simple manner in which the topics in General Pharmacology have been dealt with. This will help the students understand the basic principles very well.

The chapters begin with a brief discussion of the relevant anatomy, biochemistry, and pathophysiology, followed by a detailed pharmacological discussion on the topic. Due care has also been taken to simplify the modes of action, applied pharmacokinetics, and pharmacodynamic properties, through lucid explanation and a liberal use of illustrations and tables. Each chapter closes with a brief note on the recent advances and ongoing research on the subject under discussion, which would aid an inquisitive student to read further.

There is scope for modification in future editions. For example, the mathematical derivations and detailing of certain pharmacokinetic parameters could have been avoided. Also topics such as pharmacovigilance and adverse drug reaction monitoring, pharmaceconomics, prescription writing, drug compliance, drug discovery, and development and applied aspects of pharmacology could well be added or elaborated in future editions. The formulations, dose, and commonly available preparations could also be mentioned separately after each drug / drug group. Students usually find it difficult to remember these and need it as a handy reference for quick reading. Modern books in pharmacology demand a fine balance between the elucidation of basic concepts and applied clinical aspects. The latter needs more attention. A short bibliography at the end of each chapter could provide additional reading resources for the students who wish to study the topic in detail, for example, postgraduates or those who wish to prepare for the pre-PG entrance exams.

However, a well written book, that will serve as a useful learning resource, not only to the teachers in pharmacology and undergraduate medical students, but also to paramedical students. The authors mention in the preface, “We ourselves carry a heart of a dissatisfied student which we kept on our desk while writing the chapters. If our hearts beat normally after the end of the chapter, we considered our job done successfully. If there were arrhythmias, we explored the reasons, rewrote the whole chapter”. The authors have been successful in their endeavor and the book does preserve the sinus rhythm of the reader!

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