

Osteoporosis in Focus

Ferguson N. Pharmaceutical Press, London (England), 2002. ISBN 0 85369 483 4. Hardcover, 229 pages.

Osteoporosis in Focus is a comprehensive review of osteoporosis covering risk factors, pathophysiology, epidemiology, prevention, monitoring, and treatment of the disease. The author states in the preface that the book was “written in order to make [current knowledge of osteoporosis] more widely accessible to medics, nurses, pharmacists, other health professionals and interested members of the public.” It is intended to provide background knowledge on the basic principles of the prevention and treatment of osteoporosis.

This book is didactic and descriptive. An examination of the table of contents reveals that it is organized thematically. However, many of the individual chapters are poorly arranged and lack fluidity. The section headings are sometimes misleading, often not indicative of their content, and the text is poorly and sparsely referenced.

Bone formation, repair, and remodelling are described in detail, but the lack of illustrations could prove challenging for visual learners. The discussion of risk factors, lifestyle, and prevention are in-depth and comprehensive. The final chapters suggest recommendations for screening strategies that could be adopted by policy-makers to reduce the burden of this disease, as well as some interesting pharmaceutical care initiatives. Although it is written in the context of the British medical system, many of the ideas would be applicable in any country.

From a pharmacist's perspective, the chapters on drug treatments for osteoporosis are disappointing. The chapter providing an overview of drug therapy includes lengthy descriptions of the role of fluoride and anabolic steroids in the prevention and treatment of osteoporosis. Although neither treatment is actually recommended, the author describes their effect on bone in detail but ends each section by indicating that other, safer (in the case of the anabolic steroids) or more effective (in the case of fluoride) drugs have largely superseded their use. It is not until 5 chapters later, in the chapter titled “The Future”, that the author states that the quality of evidence for fluoride therapy has been weak and that such therapy may even

lead to a weakening of bones. Notably absent from the book is any mention of the newest treatment modality for osteoporosis, teriparatide.

The biggest shortcoming of *Osteoporosis in Focus* relates to the topic of hormone replacement therapy (HRT), which is discussed in several chapters, including one that is entirely devoted to the subject. HRT is described as a mainstay of preventive therapy in postmenopausal women, and the author notes on more than one occasion that the long-term benefits with respect to bone are realized only with long-term treatment. Readers of this book would be left with the impression that HRT should be taken over the long term for the prevention of osteoporosis and that such treatment might also be cardioprotective. There is no discussion of the risks and benefits of this therapy in light of the results of the Women's Health Initiative (WHI) trial. *Osteoporosis in Focus* was published in 2004 and includes references that date to 2003. The first WHI results (for combined estrogen and progesterone) were published in 2002. Since then, the role of HRT in the prevention and treatment of osteoporosis has changed significantly. It is no longer considered appropriate as first-line treatment if taken solely for the prevention of osteoporosis. Rather, treatment with HRT must entail careful consideration and evaluation of the risks and benefits.

When held to the standards of evidence-based medicine, this text falls short. Treatment modalities with little or no supporting evidence are described in great detail, whereas the results of the WHI trial are not presented. Several countries have published evidence-based guidelines on the prevention and treatment of osteoporosis. *Osteoporosis in Focus* often strays considerably from the recommendations presented in those guidelines and as such cannot be recommended as a resource for professionals or lay people wanting to learn more about osteoporosis.

Eden d'Entremont, BSc(Pharm), CGP
Pharmacy Consultant
Canadian Forces Drug Exception Centre
Ottawa, Ontario