Not long ago I was hearing about the imminent demise of traditional textbooks of clinical medicine due to the explosion of mostly free material readily available on the Internet. But as any busy clinician knows, a quick search through ‘Dr Google’ is unlikely to provide evidence of sufficient quality, reliability and accuracy to assist in clinical decision-making while the patient is in the consulting room in front of you. This is where high-quality, trustworthy resources become invaluable. And key players in this arena are the medical handbooks published by Oxford University Press. Since the release of the Oxford Handbook of Clinical Medicine in 1985, the series has now grown to over 50 titles and has a powerful international presence at all levels of medical education.

The fourth edition of the Oxford Handbook of General Practice has just been released. Fortunately this latest version is of similar length as the previous edition and while not exactly pocket-sized at almost 1200 pages, it sits comfortably on your desk. Another option may be the electronic version for your computer or handheld device, although only the third edition is currently available.

The information presented covers pretty much the breadth of clinical general practice, from acute emergencies through chronic disease and palliative care. The format is straightforward and each topic is divided into small chunks of information with descriptive headings, occasional charts and tables, but few pictures. Rather than wordy descriptions, the information is succinct and clearly focused around clinical management; essentially, an ideal format to assist registrars-in-training during their busy day at the office or, equally, to assist the experienced general practitioner (GP) while encountering an unfamiliar problem.

Be aware that the authors are UK GPs and although this handbook is used across the globe, the book has a very UK flavour and focus. Content is framed around UK guidelines and the UK GP training syllabus and learning environment. For those areas of medicine that are somewhat protocol-driven, such as resuscitation, the reader needs to be mindful that Australia has slightly different directives. Similarly, medication choices in Australia may be different for a variety of reasons. Nevertheless, I found the clinical content, overall, provides a very reasonable and appropriate approach for Australian conditions.

The first 100+ pages provide an interesting introduction to the UK GP landscape and personally I found this an interesting read. Although UK GPs have a different regulatory framework to Australia, it was interesting to reflect on the similarities and differences with Australia.

In summary, this is an excellent clinical resource for both registrars and experienced clinicians, albeit with a distinct UK flavor.