

The Vulva: A Clinician's Practical Handbook

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The Vulva, co-authored by a dermatologist and a gynaecologist, presents a multidisciplinary approach to vulval disease with practical management recommendations for a wide range of vulval conditions. Presenting their text as a summation of 20 years of collective experience working with patients with vulval disease, the Sydney-based authors note the lack of well conducted research to inform management, and are frank in stating that their approach may not always be supported by published trials. Nonetheless, key references are included at the end of each chapter (including several peer-reviewed journal articles by one of the authors) and the rationale for varying treatment approaches is well discussed.

The book is compact, the text easy to read. Colour coding of each chapter is helpful in navigating and returning to sections of interest. There is a short glossary of terms used throughout the book and an easy to use, comprehensive index.

The opening chapter introduces a patient-centred approach to vulval disease, with a brief overview of anatomy before discussing common presentations, principles of history taking, examination and investigation.

Vulval pathology, from the common to unusual, is addressed in six chapters based on clinical presentations:

- Red vulval rashes
- Things that look white
- Things that ulcerate, blister and erode
- Lumps: benign and malignant
- Vulval pain and dyspareunia
- Vulval disease in children.

Within each chapter, conditions are presented in a logical order and consistent manner. Succinct definitions of the condition are provided, followed by discussion of presentation, investigation, comprehensive management guidelines and indications for specialist referral. Common pitfalls in both diagnosis and management are discussed, supported by diagnostic algorithms for vulval erosion or ulceration and for vulval pain.

Full colour clinical photographs are helpfully placed adjacent to the description of many conditions. The photographs are

small, but the use of colour prints throughout is a significant achievement given the very reasonable price of the book. They are a good starting point for the beginning clinician and a helpful aide memoire for the more experienced.

The concluding chapter addresses myths about vulval disease, followed by key practice 'pearls'. Together they provide an overview of issues, questions and concerns faced by patients and clinicians dealing with vulval disease. Tips reiterate the need for open discussion with the patient, including the impact of disease on sex and relationships, how to do a vulval biopsy, the use of topical corticosteroids on the vulva, ways to optimise compliance, and when to refer to counselling, physiotherapy and pain management.

The Vulva addresses some sexually transmissible infections (STI) with sections on herpes simplex, genital warts and molluscum contagiosum. As a sexual health physician, I would have welcomed more thorough guidelines on STI testing. Despite acknowledging the need to exclude STI, surprisingly there is no specific mention of polymerase chain reaction testing for chlamydia or gonorrhoea. Suggestions for minor improvements in future editions include more detail in relation to vulval anatomy and a larger well labelled diagram of the surface anatomy of the vulva, to be used by both patients and clinicians. Recurring bacterial vaginosis could be addressed. The glossary could be extended to include some terms frequently used in the text, such as erosion and excoriation.

There are several recent vulval disease reference texts that bridge dermatology and gynaecology. *The Vulva*, with its empathic, down-to-earth and practical emphasis, is an ideal concise guide to diagnosis and treatment. It more than meets the authors' purpose of sharing their experience with a range of health professionals. It is to be commended both for its content and its affordability and will hopefully find a place in a wide range of consulting rooms.

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