Book Review: Transfusion Therapy: Clinical Principles and Practice
Paul D. Mintz (Editor), Department of Pathology, University of Virginia Medical School, Charlottesville, Virginia. (ISBN 1-563950995, AABB Press, Bethesda, Maryland, hardcover, 481 pp, 1999, $139).

Reviewed by Paul J. Schmidt
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The editor describes this work as a book for clinicians who prescribe blood transfusions. This reviewer sees that as a nearly impossible goal, since in his experience the practicing physician spends little time on the one aspect of medical practice that is contained in this 481-page volume. Transfusion is not going to cure the clinician's patient. Rather, blood transfusion is only supportive care that is relegated to ancillary systems. The secondary audience for the book is described as specialists in transfusion medicine and other healthcare professionals. Despite some problems, the book has value for those people.

Judge a book by its cover? The visual design of this book is extremely attractive and contributes to its good heft. But that positive feeling evaporates when the book is opened and its poor binding practically falls apart. The binder's glue did not do the job required for a book that will serve as a ready reference in special health care situations.

The usual quick riffling through the pages shows a real asset of the work. The editor and publisher deserve congratulations on the fine layout of the tables, all of which, although from 27 different authors, have been put into a consistent format that is easy to scan and to study.

However, the riffling also identifies a major problem with the organization of the book, ie, its references. Almost every time that the book is opened by chance, the reader comes to a page of references. Perhaps that is because the references are printed ten to a page, and because all the chapters in this book are over-heavy with references.

Several chapters contain more than 200 references. The author of one chapter with 13 pages of text includes 11 pages of references. Another author, who is writing a chapter that interprets well his own experience in a useful fashion, feels the need to support his opinions with 35 references to his own previously published works.

The editor shows his bent in the Preface, when he states that because of the wonders of electronic publishing it was possible to include text references published only ten weeks before the book was issued. Danger lies in the ability to include a reference with just a finger stroke on the keyboard.

References serve two major purposes: documentation and acknowledgement. They are intended to show evidence that we have learned from those before us, and even from ourselves, and to allow the readers to dig deeper for more information. Extensive referencing is a most valuable asset of review articles, but in the opinion of this reviewer extensive reference lists should not be necessary in what the editor describes as a guide to clinical practice. It is to be hoped that electronic publishing will not bring a spate of recording on paper of information that we could readily obtain for ourselves from the available electronic databases.

Having spent much of this critique on the technical problems that he perceives in this book, the reviewer wishes to end with the ample praise that this book deserves for its contents. Most of the chapters are well written; they give thorough explanations of the clinical events that require transfusion, and they delineate an excellent approach to proper use of transfusion therapy.