Comprehensive Medical Toxicology by V. V. Pillay, Published by Paras Medical Publisher, Hyderabad, India. First Edition, 2003. ISBN 81-88129-86-0. Pages 693 (Price. Rs. 750/-).

Justifying the title, ‘Comprehensive Medical Toxicology’ by V. V. Pillay provides details and illustrations adequate for understanding the subject without undergoing the cumbersome ordeal of gathering information from other sources. Information regarding different aspects of this discipline has been collected, sifted and presented in a simple form under five major sections.

The book starts with the section on ‘General Toxicology’ dealing with the principles of the diagnosis and management of poisoning. Vital issues like the medicolegal duties of a doctor in cases of poisoning and Indian statutes on drugs/poisons are dealt with precisely under medicolegal considerations. Since reports of laboratory investigations substantiate the conclusions drawn by clinical assessment, the laboratory tests and principles of analytical procedures described in the chapter on ‘Analytical toxicology’ will benefit the clinicians. Toxicological aspects of chemicals including pesticides are described in the section on ‘Chemical Toxicology’.

Different classes of the currently available drugs are described from a toxicological point of view in the section on ‘Pharmaceutical Toxicology’ with particulars on fatal dose, toxicokinetics and drug interactions. Striking a balance between the old and the new, details on known drugs as well as information regarding newer drugs and agents used in disorders that have gained importance recently like Alzheimer’s disease are included.

Apart from the customary details on poisonous plants and venomous bites or stings, botanical or zoological particulars essential for the clinician are described with impressive color plates and figures in the section on ‘Biotoxicology’. The concluding section on ‘Sociomedical Toxicology’ deals with substances of dependence and abuse. Poisoning severity score, Glasgow coma scale, Forensic science laboratories in India and Beck’s depression scale are presented as appendices for reference. An exclusive brand index in addition to the general index at the end facilitates access to the particulars of a chemical or drug, the brand name(s) of which are presented as tables in the respective chapters.

References cited in the main text and in the boxes are adequate to cater the needs of an ambitious reader interested in getting additional details from the source of information. These are listed at the end of each chapter in the order of their appearance in the text, while those cited in the boxes are given under the corresponding box. Key words and abbreviations are explained as they appear in the text.

Particulars given in the tables assist in getting information at a glance. Essential details are made conspicuous by bulleted or numbered statements. Information deserving special attention or specific description is given in boxes. Numbering the tables, figures and boxes according to the chapter gives a better correlation.

This book, with adequate references, gives authentic information enough to meet the needs of advanced undergraduates and graduate students. This is also suitable as a reference book for graduate biologists, toxicologists, pharmacologists, clinicians and a variety of students who wish to obtain additional knowledge of medical toxicology. As stated in the preface, the users of this book will find it useful and interesting. The utility value of the book surpasses its cost, as it provides enough information for appreciation of the theoretical foundation of medical toxicology as well as for the application of basic principles and concepts.

With an elegant cover, the appeal of the book is enhanced by the paper and print quality of international standards. The text is interspersed with bulleted presentation of essential points, tables, boxes, figures and color plates such that the reader is inclined to study with augmented interest.

While information on the theoretical aspects of medical toxicology can be had from available textbooks, ‘Comprehensive Medical Toxicology’ by V. V. Pillay, with its unique design provides an understanding of the subject that can be effectively applied in practical situations.

R. Venkatakrishna Murali
Department of Pharmacology, Dr. A. L. M. Post Graduate Institute of Basic Medical Sciences, Taramani Campus, Chennai - 603113, India. E-mail: pgibms@md2.vsnl.net.in