Anesthesia Review: Blasting the Boards

Anesthesia Review: Blasting the Boards by Berg, Zhao, and Bittner aims at providing a broad-based, but concise, review book for anesthesiologists preparing to take the American Board of Anesthesiology’s (ABA) written board examination. The authors are or at one time were in the anesthesiology department at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, MA. The authors’ academic teaching roles are useful as they are able to distill complex topics in anesthesiology down to the most salient points relevant to the written board examination.

The text of Anesthesia Review: Blasting the Boards is written in plain and simple language with short sentences, making it both quick to read and easy to maintain focus on the material presented. One such example of this is the chapter devoted to the anesthesia machine and breathing circuits. Normally, this important topic is not necessarily what candidates sitting for the examination look forward to reviewing. However, the authors have condensed this oft dreaded and onerous topic down to just a few short, easy-to-read pages devoid of excessive technical jargon. By communicating the information in this manner, even a topic such as this is easily digestible in this book. This represents a real strength of Anesthesia Review.

The scope of topics covered is broad, including everything from the basics of anesthesia delivery systems to aspects of different subspecialty anesthetic practices such as cardiac and pediatrics. The content and outline of the book closely follow the American Board of Anesthesiology Part I Examination blueprint.1 Each chapter contains short practice questions with answers. These are written in the current ABA board examination format and are useful tools to help readers assess their understanding of the material. This book is a very efficient and high-yield review, because it does not require the devotion of excessive effort to overly lengthy explanations or controversial interventions in the information it provides. The information presented in the book appears to be correct and backed up by evidence when definitive claims are made. Like all strong and useful review books, this is an ideal template for an audience that is already well read on the fundamentals of anesthetic practice. However, this text will not substitute for a lack of previous effort for those who do not already possess a good basic fund of knowledge based on other sources (nor is it designed to). We would caution anyone who has not already spent a significant amount of time reading primary textbooks against using this book, or any purely review text, as the sole study tool for their ABA written board examination.

Compared with other ABA written board examination review books currently available, this review book is far shorter in length and more concise. Many review books currently offered are several hundred pages long and contain significant amounts of redundant information. For example, in comparison with the popular Faust’s Anesthesiology Review,2 this book is approximately half the length and is specifically a board review book, whereas Faust markets itself as a more general review of anesthesiology.3 This book fills a gap in the current market for less arduous and daunting review books. The vast majority of the anesthesiologists taking the ABA written board examination have already spent significant amounts of time during residency reading various primary textbooks, and this book can be the perfect companion guide to brush up on and assess their knowledge base. After review of this text, we would not be at all surprised to see this book become a “go to” review book for study for the ABA written board examination.

Jue T. Wang, MD
Craig D. McClain, MD, MPH
Department of Anesthesiology, Perioperative and Pain Medicine
Boston Children’s Hospital and Harvard Medical School
Boston, Massachusetts
craig.mcclain@childrens.harvard.edu

REFERENCES