

UTMJ Reviews – Family Medicine

Sexual Medicine in Primary Care

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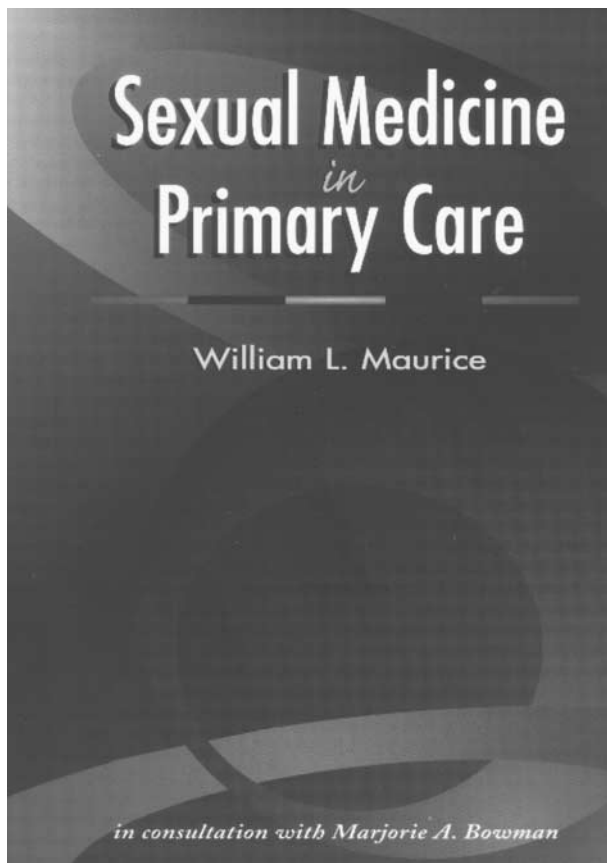
Publisher: Mosby

Date of Publication: 1999

Number of pages: 366

Cost: Paperback edition, \$63.95 (CDN)

Strengths: Interesting and easy to understand
Weaknesses: Discussion of sexual dysfunctions too general and superficial in parts
Audience: Undergraduate medical students, residents and practitioners of family medicine



There is growing recognition that sexuality plays a significant role in quality of life. Sexual problems may cause significant emotional and physical distress. Patients expect their family physicians to be experts in sexual health and turn to them for sound, thoughtful advice and effective intervention. Sexual inquiry and education are therefore essential components of responsible and comprehensive healthcare. Most generalists, however, feel unprepared to deal with sexual concerns. A lack of medical understanding about sexual matters combined with concerns about offending or embarrassing patients have made many physicians wary of sexual inquiry. There is also a lack of material providing practical advice in this area for primary care practitioners. Most of the currently available texts address sexual issues from the perspective of secondary care providers in gynaecology and urology, and provide only the essentials of diagnosis and management. For these reasons, *Sexual Medicine in Primary Care* is a timely and practical addition to the library of any primary care provider.

Part I of the book discusses history taking, interviewing and assessment. It provides practical advice for talking about sexual issues while preserving the dignity of the patient. In particular, sensitive areas such as sexual orientation, sexual difficulties and sexual issues in the context of medical and psychiatric disorders are discussed. Simple

algorithms and sample interviews help the reader follow up on a positive answer to a sexual screening question. Clinical vignettes are often used as a basis for discussion, and these are both interesting and informative. Finally, the Appendices contain complete samples of first-assessment interviews and case histories that are helpful learning tools for students, residents and clinicians.

Part II of the book focuses on the diagnosis and treatment of the most common sexual dysfunctions, such as low desire, erectile disorders and intercourse difficulties in women. Medical definitions and classifications are presented in a readable and organized format. The investigative process, from the history and physical to laboratory studies, is simply and methodically reviewed, and the rationale for each question or procedure is explained. The author outlines when treatment is within the realm of the family physician and describes situations in which referral to another health care provider may be necessary. The Appendices provide an extensive table of medications that interfere with sexual function and lists of useful resources, including web sites and selected self-help books, for both patients and health professionals.

There are two very strong points about this book. First, it provides information that is practical and relevant. Second, it delivers this information in a very readable and

understandable format. The most important points of a given paragraph or section are highlighted with bold-faced sentences in the margin. Boxes emphasize important facts, flow charts and lists. Clinical vignettes and sample interviews add a personal touch to the medical facts. The summaries at the end of each chapter do an excellent job of reiterating only the most important points.

The main caveat I would give to anyone reading *Sexual Medicine in Primary Care* is that the book is limited to an approach towards common sexual problems. It is not a reference text on the pathobiology of sexual disorders and many dysfunctions are discussed only superficially. For some of the conditions with a definite organic etiology, I found this to be a weakness. Figures highlighting the relevant anatomy and reviews of both the normal and abnormal physiology would have been an asset.

Nonetheless, *Sexual Medicine in Primary Care* does provide a practical and relevant review of an area of medicine that many health professionals are reluctant to discuss with their patients. I would recommend it to medical students particularly for its advice on sexual inquiry, as this is a responsibility of clerks and residents in any discipline. As a review of common sexual dysfunctions, this book would also be a useful resource for any family physician.