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AMA's Drug Evaluations

by Carol Proudfit, Ph.D.

The American Medical Association's *Drug Evaluations (DE)* is a unique publication in that it contains discussions about indications for drug use, including unlabeled uses not found in the FDA package insert; alternative therapies; and, if possible, the drug(s) of choice for a particular condition. *DE* also includes discussions about drug treatment in the context of other therapies, such as radiation therapy or surgery. Finally, it also mentions important investigational drugs that are nearing FDA approval.

Most chapters in the three volume, looseleaf notebook set are therapeutically oriented rather than based on pharmacologic classifications. Thus, for example, chapters within the oncolytic drug section include: DNA damaging drugs; antimetabolites; antibiotics, alkaloids, and enzymes; and hormonal agents and biological response modifiers. Two multipaged tables are provided in an introductory chapter on cancer chemotherapy. One table lists individual cancer drugs according to class and summarizes for each drug important properties, including elimination, major toxicity, and indications. Table two includes preferred regimens for various cancers.

DE is fully referenced and covers combination regimens. Because of the therapeutic organization, *DE* lends itself to discussions of combination drug therapy where appropriate to treat a disease.

There must be a significant body of scientific evidence to justify an unlabeled use before it will be recommended by *DE* for an unlabeled indication.

THE UPDATING PROCESS

A staff of pharmacologists is responsible for updating the previous edition. AMA also uses a select group of consultants who are experts in their fields—most of whom are practitioners—to review the revised draft. More than 800 consultants have reviewed material contained in a *DE* text. The number of consultants per chapter varies widely, depending on the nature of the chapter.

AMA also sends revised drafts to the major manufacturers of a particular drug for their input. Manufacturers primarily comment on the preparation information contained in the publications. However, on occasion, they provide important information on background pharmacology.

Each chapter of *DE* is then revised again by in-house staff and prepared for publication.

A PHYSICIAN FOCUS

DE is complementary to rather than competitive with the other two compendia. AMA's position is that *DE* is one of three compendia and that no one of the three publications is preferable as a sole source of information. For instance, the other compendia do a good job of covering such concerns as adverse reactions and drug administration, but neither provides the evaluative aspect of drug therapy that is the focus of *DE*.

DE is primarily directed to the physician, whereas the *USP DI* is used by pharmacists, and *AHFS Drug Information* is identified with the pharmacy profession.

DE is available in three formats:

- *Drug Evaluations Subscription.* An initial subscription consists of three looseleaf notebooks, slipcase, and full contents of *DE*. Also provided are quarterly updates that include 1) revised chapters, 2) new drug evaluations, and 3) the *DE Monitor* newsletter. This newsletter contains the most current information on important withdrawals, new drugs on the market, and new preparations, as well as articles on drug policy issues of general interest.
- *Drug Evaluations Annual.* This text, which is updated yearly, contains the full contents of the subscription product through the Summer update.
- *Drug Evaluations on CD-ROM.* This is available as part of Teton Data Systems STAT!-REF electronic library.

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AHFS Drug Information

by Gerald K. McEvoy, Pharm.D.

AHFS Drug Information (originally known as the American Hospital Formulary Service) was first published in 1959 as an adaptation of the University of Michigan's *Hospital Formulary of Selected Drugs* by Don E. Francke. Originally, the Service was conducted through the Committee of Pharmacy and Pharmaceuticals of the American Society of Hospital Pharmacists (ASHP) to assist the pharmacy and therapeutics committee of each hospital in preparing its hospital formulary. The purpose of *AHFS Drug Information* was to provide objective, evaluative drug information to assist clinicians in the safe and effective use of drugs.

At the time of the publication's development, there was a dearth of evaluative information on drugs in a readily accessible form. From a historical perspective, drugs available for use in the United States were required only to be safe; demonstration of effectiveness was not necessary. Thus, one of the principal goals of *AHFS Drug Information*, since its inception, has been to provide objective evaluations on a drug's use, including perspectives on the role of the agent compared with other therapies.

A principal strength of *AHFS Drug Information* is the variety and depth of information provided on each drug. As a general drug information source, *AHFS Drug Information* provides comprehensive information in a structured style on drug uses, dosage, and administration, and includes discussions on chemistry and stability, pharmacology, pharmacokinetics, drug interactions, toxicity, and in-depth descriptions of adverse effects, including associated precautions and contraindications. *AHFS Drug Information* includes information under the generic name of the

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