

Book Review

Review by Kathleen Head, ND

The Hepatitis C Handbook, 2nd Ed.

by Matthew Dolan

North Atlantic Books, P.O. Box 12327, Berkeley, CA 94712

ISBN 1-555643-313-1

Soft-cover \$25.00 (\$38.00 Canada); 473 pgs.

Just at the moment the editors at *Alternative Medicine Review* were taking a special interest in researching hepatitis C (HCV), *The Hepatitis C Handbook* appeared in the office — an updated, second edition of a book previously published in 1996. In the case of a condition like HCV, new information appears almost on a daily basis, necessitating frequent updates. Matthew Dolan, who has HCV himself, provides a valuable tool for others with HCV. In addition, the book offers useful, up-to-date information for the clinician on the nature of the virus, its transmission, epidemiology, diagnosis, and conventional approaches. Also covered are implications of co-infection, particularly with HIV, hepatitis B, and hepatitis G. Sections particularly significant to patients discuss how to respond to the diagnosis, talk to doctors, and change behaviors which may have contributed to the disease.

The second half of the book discusses alternative medical approaches to HCV. The author provides extensive detail on the use of traditional Chinese medicine (including herbal therapy, acupuncture, and Qi gong), and cites several references, including studies on the use of Chinese and Japanese herbal formulas, in the treatment of HCV. A less extensive chapter on Ayurvedic approaches follows. Somewhat less impressive are the chapters on Western botanicals and vitamins, minerals, and amino acids. In both cases, the author lists an A-Z herbal or nutrient reference and, although he focuses more attention on nutrients and botanicals which show promise for the treatment of HCV, a patient attempting to sift through the information might find it hard to determine the most appropriate course of action. So, while it is a good self-help book, guidance from an experienced naturopathic physician or other well-trained practitioner of natural medicine seems warranted.

Speaking of naturopathy, the chapter entitled “Hepatitis C and Naturopathy: The No Treatment Approach” was disappointing. Granted, the author is from Great Britain, where the definition of naturopathy may be different. The chapter starts, “Naturopathy can be described as a tradition of health care that excludes intervention of any kind.... The closest it comes to treatment is the adoption of restrictive diets, particular forms of exercise such as the adoption of certain yoga positions, and the practice of fasting.” The remainder of the chapter (three pages) discusses fasting. Apparently the author is unaware naturopathic physicians employ botanical medicine, nutrients, diet, homeopathy, hydrotherapy, physical medicine, Chinese medicine, Ayurvedic medicine, etc. Patients with HCV seek alternative medical services because their conventional physician offered them the “no treatment approach” or because the treatment they were offered was unsuccessful or resulted in significant side-effects.

While, on the whole, the book has much to offer, practitioners should read the book carefully before recommending it to their patients so inaccuracies can be illuminated.