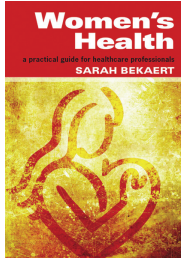


Women's Health

A practical guide for healthcare professionals



Author: Sarah Bekaert

Pub. Date: October 2007

Publisher: Radcliffe Publishing, Oxford & New York, 2007. No. of pages 200

ISBN-978 1 84619 029 2

Orders: <http://www.radcliffe-oxford.com>

صحة النساء

الدليل العملي للمهنيين في الرعاية الطبية

المؤلف: سارة بيكارث

THE GURU OF FRENCH FEMINISM AND existentialist ethics, Simone de Beauvoir, epitomised the view that biology is not destiny. She remarked, "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman". Simone de Beauvoir would turn in her grave if she knew about Sarah Bekaert's volume, *Women's Health: A Practical Guide for Healthcare Professionals*. The very fact that it focuses on women's health appears to challenge Simone de Beauvoir's premises about gender and identity. Of course, the world has changed since Simone de Beauvoir's heyday. The discussion as to whether culture or biology plays the major role in the development of womanhood has been relegated to a trivial footnote by our contemporaries. The spirit of this age, as encapsulated in the Sarah Bekaert's volume, emphasises the fact that females are different from males. As if to vandalise Simone de Beauvoir's legacy, the view that biology is destiny has been firmly embraced by mainstream medical culture. This has grown out of increased interest in what makes women tick in health related matters, so that tailored-made and evidence-based etiology, prevention and treatment for women can be consolidated.

This wind of change has found important allies. In the past decade, the Office on Women's Health in the US Department of Health and Human Services has been established. Several publications have also emerged focusing on solely on women's health. The academic approach in this endeavour includes scholarly publications such as *Health Care for Women International*, *Women & Aging*, *Women & Therapy*, to name just a few. There is also the new *Harvard Guide to Women's Health*. Other ivy league universities have joined the bandwagon, churning out many books on similar issues, further testifying to the current relevance of this issue.

In this context, Sarah Bekaert's volume brings fresh insight into a field that has been progressively nurtured by her experienced as a paediatric nurse with degrees in gynaecology and reproductive health and membership of the British Association for sexual health and HIV. The volume aims to familiarise the practitioner with the disorders and conditions that manifest differently or exclusively in women. Thus, if the knowledge it contains is applied properly, it may be the best way to ensure proper health care for women.

The volume is a practical guide addressing the unique, multidisciplinary aspects of women's health issues. The goal of the author is to offer the practitioner a quick reference guide to possible diagnosis according to symptoms, and the tests that could be performed with to reach a diagnosis. In order to provide a comprehensive guide, brief descriptions of the conditions and tests are included for the convenience of the reader.

The chapters are grouped in to five sections: Symptom sorter, Conditions, Tests and procedures, Contraception and Sexually transmitted infections. The first chapter provides a comprehensive view of the possible signs and symptoms of common female health concerns. It is intended only as a guide and should not be a substitute for communication and liaison with colleagues.

The author presents and discusses almost all areas of women's health including menstrual symptoms, hormonal changes, sexual health, pelvic conditions, pregnancy and infertility, in addition to breast symptoms, urinary symptoms and weight. The chapter on tests and procedures gives an idea about those commonly used in relation to women's health. It includes the physical examination, blood tests, imaging and samples. The reader would be particularly impressed with the final two chapters which deal with contraception and sexually transmitted infections because of their significance in many women's lives. All five chapters are brief overviews of medical issues relevant to women. The selection of topics is very extensive.

Is this volume is a retreat from the hard won advances of feminism? It maybe so for Madame Simone

de Beauvoir's 'diehards'. This book is, however, not a challenge to such classic treatises, but simply a teaching manual with high-quality graphics and photographs accompanied by a generous number of tables. It is easy to read because it maintains a simple structure. The strength of the volume is that women's health issues are simplified. The book provides basic information on conditions, tests required and links to useful related resources. Thus, it will be useful for medical students, interns and residents. Because of the simple language used it can also be used by a layperson concerned about women's health. The book would be an essential guide for all medical practitioners, but more so for female practitioners with specific interest in women's health. Its audience could even include males who are well known to dwell at the lower end of evolutionary ladder in term of their understanding of the female body and health. The take home message is that women's health should require special consideration. The book departs from the previous chauvinistic approach and teleological debate as to whether or not biology is destiny.

REVIEWER

Rahma Al-Kindi

Department of Family Medicine and Public Health, College of Medicine and Health Sciences, Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

Email: rkindi@squ.edu.om