
The Basic and Clinical Science Course; World's Leading Ophthalmic Education Resources

Editorial/Mini-review

The Basic and Clinical Science Course (BCSC) book series served as an excellent companion to more comprehensive texts for residents who are reviewing and studying basic and clinical science. The book series deals mainly with the most up to date key facts that are imperative from basic sciences perspectives to recent advances and clinical studies in the field of ophthalmology and visual sciences. This endeavor has been of incalculable advantage to the quality of ophthalmic care worldwide. Thus, it was selected as one of the "one hundred important 20th century ophthalmic books" in the "Arch Ophthalmol" Journal. New generation of BCSC would be excellent resources with being one of the most frequently used books to study for ophthalmology examinations in recent years. They are well organized and straight forward major textbooks worldwide.

BCSC book series by American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) has been established as one of the world's prominent ophthalmic resources; they have been posted for readers with hundreds of figures and self-assessment tools. These and numerous other additional characteristics ensure their continuing status as a prominent information resource in the field of ophthalmology and visual sciences. The BCSC series is considered to be refreshingly unique educational materials. The book series deals principally with the most contemporary key facts and topics that are imperative from anatomy, embryology, and physiology perspectives to recent advances and clinical studies.

The Basic and Clinical Science Course book series was initiated in 1938, when Dr Harry Gradle proposed to the AAO to initiate a home study course for ophthalmology trainees. In 1970 the course was restructured and its name was altered to the BCSC. By 1975 it was specifically intended for both ophthalmologists in training and in practice. Every year a set of more than 10 volumes was published, each volume devoted to a particular section of ophthalmic comprehension. AAO through the BCSC has been distributing fresh ophthalmic knowledge throughout the world for the last 70 years. Unique in its format, this series is both intentionally didactic, repetitive and focus on most frequently addressed basic and clinical subjects. This project has been of incalculable advantage to the quality of ophthalmic care worldwide. Therefore it was designated as one of the "one hundred important 20th century ophthalmic books".¹

More care, supplementary researches and most of all more continuous education are necessary if we are to combat the rates of blindness and visual handicaps universally by the year of 2020. In the meantime, these available and up to date resources should fill the requirement for this indispensable information repository. The BCSC covers everything from basic anatomy, optics and pathology to specialized topics such as pediatric ophthalmology and even eyelid reconstruction. The series features "self-assessment study questions" and answers for each section and have been included with hundreds of high quality images which are available in the print and online formats. Each section is updated approximately every 3 years on a rolling schedule. It should be noted that one of the most reader-friendly features of the book is its thoughtful use of tables to outline some of the major clinical points. The quantity and quality of graphic representations in some sections such as pathology are particularly strong. Overall, approximately 30-40 multiple-choice questions with adequate explanations are included at the end of all sections. Generally, they are intended for residents-in-training who are expected to know almost every esoteric fact in order to be an expert general ophthalmologist. The books target those planning to sit for different styles of postgraduate exams from American Board of Ophthalmology examinations or the OKAP to British style examinations as well as various formats of International Council of Ophthalmology (ICO) assessments up to the final parts.

Although in 2012-2013, three sections underwent major revision however it seems that the context of the course may need additional figures to illustrate the signs of ophthalmic diseases prominently. In addition the layout and outline forms may require major reconsideration in forthcoming issues in order to present information more user-friendly in boxes and tables with additional schematic figures. It has been assumed that the books transfer fundamental knowledge of medical and surgical ophthalmology however in a small number of sections such as in section seven, in the topic of cosmetic facial surgery; it highlights surgical techniques in detail that seems more than enough for a routine practice of a general ophthalmologist.

The BCSC has been available for over seven decades. It is highly readable and will provide a useful guidebook for both residents and ophthalmologists. The breadth of information covered and the organization of the material are exceptional. The AAO updates and revises the course annually, with the aim of integrating the basic science and clinical practice of ophthalmology and of keeping ophthalmologists current and up to date advances in visual sciences. Currently, establishment of the BCSC comprises 13 volumes, incorporating fundamental information. Furthermore, a widespread Master Index supports the users to effortlessly locate subjects throughout the various subjects. Those who would like to explore particular subjects in greater details might refer to the up to date references cited within the chapters and listed at the end of each volume. Study questions and Continuing Medical Education (CME) Credit of the BCSC is designed as an individual study activity for the local ophthalmology residents and practitioners. Physicians who wish to claim CME credit for this educational activity may do so by mail, fax or claim through online versions. The learning objectives for every volume are given initially in the first page. With the addition of much new-fangled text and numerous illustrations, current editions have sought to place a more emphasis on clinical applicability while maintaining a firm foundation in basic as well as in clinical science. As its faculties change and as medicinal sciences progress, new opinions continue to emerge on controversial subjects and surgical techniques.²

In summary, the organization of these books set them different and really superior to other educational materials therefore they should be considered as supplement educational resources in clinical settings.

Last but not least, new generation of BCSC would be an excellent resources for the ophthalmologists who studying for the national and international examinations. They are well organized, simple and are ideally suited for candidates who need comprehensive information regarding ophthalmology and visual sciences although they might be accompanied with a color atlas of ophthalmology in order to assist learning process as an invaluable “bedside” companion. However, one must remember when desiring these books to study, that they are not a primary text, but rather another tool to be used when doing a review in all subspecialized fields of ophthalmology.

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