CLINICAL ECHOCARDIOGRAPHY REVIEW

A Self-Assessment Tool

EDITORS

Allan L. Klein, MD, FRCP(C), FACC, FAHA, FASE
Professor of Medicine
Cleveland Clinic Lerner College of Medicine of Case Western Reserve University
Director, Cardiovascular Imaging Research
Director, Center for the Diagnosis and Treatment of Pericardial Diseases
Department of Cardiovascular Medicine
Heart and Vascular Institute
Cleveland Clinic
Cleveland, Ohio

Craig R. Asher, MD, FACC
Cardiology Fellowship Director
Department of Cardiology
Cleveland Clinic Florida
Weston, Florida

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## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Physics of Ultrasound, Technique and Instrumentation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Victor Mor-Avi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Cardiac Ultrasound Artifacts</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Juan-Carlos Brenes and Craig R. Asher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Transthoracic Echocardiography: M-Mode and Two-Dimensional</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gerard P. Aurigemma and Dennis A. Tighe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Three-dimensional Echocardiography</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lissa Sugeng, Sonal Chandra, and Lynn Weinert</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Transesophageal Echocardiography</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L. Leonardo Rodriguez</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Sonographer Goal Oriented Technique</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Annitta J. Morehead</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Doppler and Hemodynamics</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Muhamed Saric and Itzhak Kronzon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Tissue Doppler and Strain</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Steve L. Liao and Mario J. Garcia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Contrast-Enhanced Ultrasound Imaging</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roxy Senior and Steven B. Feinstein</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Systolic Function Assessment</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thomas H. Marwick</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Diastology</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Andrew O. Zurick, David Verhaert, and Allan L. Klein</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Stress Echocardiography</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Omar Wever-Pinzon and Farooq A. Chaudhry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Intraoperative Echocardiography</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>William J. Stewart</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Dyssynchrony Evaluation/AV Optimization</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Victoria Delgado and Jeroen J. Bax</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Coronary Artery Disease</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ronald Mastouri and Stephen G. Sawada</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Pulmonic and Tricuspid Valvular Disease</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brian P. Griffin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Authors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Aortic and Mitral Valvular Disease</td>
<td>Sorin V. Pislaru and Maurice Enriquez-Sarano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Prosthetic Valves</td>
<td>Linda D. Gillam and Smriti Deshmukh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Endocarditis</td>
<td>Ying Sia and Kwan-Leung Chan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Cardiomyopathies</td>
<td>Marianela Areces and Craig R. Asher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Systemic Disease</td>
<td>Imran S. Syed, Charles J. Bruce, and Heidi M. Connolly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Pericardial Diseases</td>
<td>Partho P. Sengupta and James B. Seward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Aortic Diseases</td>
<td>Gian M. Novaro and Craig R. Asher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Atrial Fibrillation</td>
<td>Susie N. Hong-Zohlman, David I. Silverman, and Warren J. Manning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Right Ventricular Disease and Pulmonary Hypertension</td>
<td>Sherif F. Nagueh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Cyanotic Congenital Heart Disease</td>
<td>Nishant Shah and Richard A. Humes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Noncyanotic Congenital Heart Disease</td>
<td>Benjamin W. Eidem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Tumors/Masses</td>
<td>Shephard D. Weiner and Shunichi Homma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Index</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Marianela Areces, MD  
Department of Cardiology  
Cleveland Clinic Florida  
Weston, Florida

Craig R. Asher, MD  
Cardiology Fellowship Director  
Department of Cardiology  
Cleveland Clinic  
Weston, Florida

Gerard P. Aurigemma, MD  
Professor  
Departments of Medicine and Radiology  
University of Massachusetts Medical School  
Director, Noninvasive Cardiology  
Department of Medicine/Division of  
Cardiovascular Disease  
UMassMemorial Healthcare  
Worcester, Massachusetts

Jeroen J. Bax, MD, PhD  
Director of Noninvasive Imaging  
Professor of Cardiology  
Department of Cardiology  
Leiden University Medical Center  
Leiden, The Netherlands

Juan-Carlos Brenes, MD, FACC, FASE  
Department of Cardiology  
Columbia University  
Co-Director, Echocardiography Laboratory  
Columbia University Division of Cardiology  
Mount Sinai Medical Center  
Miami Beach, Florida

Charles J. Bruce, MBChB, FCP (SA),  
FACC, FASE  
Associate Professor of Medicine  
College of Medicine  
Consultant  
Division of Cardiovascular Diseases  
Mayo Clinic  
Rochester, Minnesota

Kwan-Leung Chan, MD, FRCPC, FACC  
Cardiologist  
University of Ottawa Heart Institute and the  
Ottawa Hospital  
Professor  
Department of Medicine  
University of Ottawa  
Ottawa, Ontario  
Canada

Sonal Chandra, MD  
Clinical Associate  
Department of Cardiology  
University of Chicago  
Chicago, Illinois

Farooq A. Chaudhry, MD, FACP, FACC,  
FASE, FAHA  
Associate Professor of Medicine  
Columbia University College of Physicians and  
Surgeons  
Associate Chief of Cardiology  
Director of Echocardiography  
St. Luke’s Roosevelt Hospital Center  
New York, New York

Heidi M. Connolly, MD  
Professor of Medicine  
College of Medicine  
Consultant  
Division of Cardiovascular Diseases  
Mayo Clinic  
Rochester, Minnesota

Victoria Delgado, MD, PhD  
Staff Cardiologist  
Department of Cardiology  
Leiden University Medical Center  
Leiden, The Netherlands

Smriti Deshmukh, MD  
Assistant Clinical Professor of Medicine  
Department of Medicine, Division of Cardiology  
Columbia University  
Attending Cardiologist  
Department of Medicine  
The Presbyterian Hospital  
New York, New York
Benjamin W. Eidem, MD, FACC, FASE
Associate Professor
Departments of Pediatrics and Pediatric Cardiology
Mayo Clinic
Rochester, Minnesota

Maurice Enriquez-Sarano, MD
Professor of Medicine
Division of Cardiovascular Diseases
Director
Valvular Heart Disease Clinic
Mayo Clinic and Foundation
Rochester, Minnesota

Steven B. Feinstein, MD, FACC
Professor of Medicine/Cardiology
Director of Echocardiography
Department of Medicine/Cardiology
Rush University Medical Center
Chicago, Illinois

Mario J. Garcia, MD, FACC, FACP
Professor of Medicine and Radiology
Chief, Division of Cardiology
Montefiore Medical Center-Albert Einstein College of Medicine Cardiology
Bronx, New York

Linda D. Gillam, MD, FACC, FAHA, FASE
Professor of Clinical Medicine
Columbia University
College of Physicians & Surgeons
Medical Director, Cardiac Valve Program
Department of Medicine
Columbia University Medical Center
New York, New York

Brian P. Griffin, MD, FACC
Director Cardiovascular Medicine Training Program
John and Rosemary Brown Chair in Cardiovascular Medicine
Department of Cardiovascular Medicine
Heart and Vascular Institute
Cleveland Clinic
Cleveland, Ohio

Shunichi Homma, MD
MM Hatch Professor of Medicine
Department of Medicine—Cardiology
Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons
Attending Physician
Department of Medicine—Cardiology
New York Presbyterian Hospital
Columbia University Medical Center
New York, New York

Susie N. Hong-Zohlman, MD
Research Fellow in Medicine
Department of Medicine
Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center
Boston, Massachusetts

Richard A. Humes, MD
Professor
Department of Pediatrics
Wayne State University
Chief
Division of Cardiology
Children’s Hospital of Michigan
Detroit, Michigan

Allan L. Klein, MD, FRCP(C), FACC, FAHA, FASE
Professor of Medicine
Cleveland Clinic Lerner College of Medicine of Case Western Reserve University
Director, Cardiovascular Imaging Research
Director, Center for the Diagnosis and Treatment of Pericardial Diseases
Department of Cardiovascular Medicine
Heart and Vascular Institute
Cleveland Clinic
Cleveland, Ohio

Itzhak Kronzon, MD, FASE
Professor of Medicine
Associate Chairman of Cardiovascular Medicine
Director of Cardiac Imaging
Lenox Hill Heart and Vascular Institute of New York
New York, New York

Steve L. Liao, MD
The James J. Peters Veteran Affairs Medical Center
Department of Medicine, Cardiovascular Division
Bronx, New York
The Zena and Michael A. Weiner Cardiovascular Institute
The Mount Sinai School of Medicine
New York, New York
Warren J. Manning, MD  
Professor of Medicine  
Department of Medicine  
Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center  
Boston, Massachusetts

Thomas H. Marwick, MD, PhD, FRACP, FRCP, FESC, FACC  
Section Head Cardiovascular Imaging  
Department of Cardiovascular Medicine  
Heart and Vascular Institute  
Cleveland Clinic  
Cleveland, Ohio

Ronald Mastouri, MD  
Assistant Professor of Clinical Medicine  
Department of Medicine  
Indiana University Medical Center  
Krannert Institute of Cardiology  
Indianapolis, Indiana

Victor Mor-Avi, PhD  
Research Associate  
Professor  
Director of Cardiac Imaging Research  
Department of Medicine, Section of Cardiology  
University of Chicago  
Chicago, Illinois

Annitta J. Morehead, BA, RDCS  
Manager, Cardiovascular Imaging Core  
Heart and Vascular Institute  
Cleveland Clinic  
Cleveland, Ohio

Sherif F. Nagueh, MD, FACC, FAHA  
Professor of Medicine  
Department of Cardiology  
Weill Cornell Medical College  
Associate Director, Echocardiography Laboratory  
Methodist DeBakey Heart and Vascular Center  
The Methodist Hospital  
Houston, Texas

Gian M. Novaro, MD, MS  
Director, Echocardiography  
Department of Cardiology  
Cleveland Clinic Florida  
Weston, Florida

Sorin V. Pislaru, MD, PhD  
Assistant Professor of Medicine  
Division of Cardiovascular Diseases  
Mayo Clinic and Foundation  
Rochester, Minnesota

L. Leonardo Rodriguez, MD  
Program Director, Advanced Fellowship Program  
Department of Cardiovascular Medicine  
Heart and Vascular Institute  
Cleveland Clinic  
Cleveland, Ohio

Muhammad Saric, MD, PhD  
Associate Professor of Medicine  
Department of Medicine  
New York University School of Medicine;  
Associate Director  
Noninvasive Cardiology Laboratory  
New York University Medical Center  
New York, New York

Stephen G. Sawada, MD  
Department of Medicine  
Indiana University Medical Center  
Krannert Institute of Cardiology  
Indianapolis, Indiana

Partho P. Sengupta, MD, DM  
Associate Professor of Medicine  
Director of Noninvasive Cardiology  
Department of Medicine  
University of California Irvine  
Irvine, California

Roxy Senior, MD, DM, FRCP, FESC, FACC  
Consultant Cardiologist  
Director of Cardiac Research  
Northwick Park Hospital  
Honorary Professor, Middlesex University, London  
Honorary Senior Lecturer, Imperial College, London  
Middlesex, Harrow, United Kingdom

James B. Seward, MD, FACC  
Professor of Medicine and Pediatrics  
Division of Cardiovascular Research  
Mayo Clinic Rochester  
Rochester, Minnesota
Nishant Shah, MD
Assistant Professor
Department of Pediatrics
Wayne State University
Children's Hospital of Michigan Detroit
Detroit, Michigan

Ying T. Sia, MD, MSc, FRCRC
Associate Professor
Department of Medicine
University of Montreal
Attending
Department of Medicine, Service of Cardiology
Centre Hospitalier de l'Université de Montreal
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

David I. Silverman, MD
Professor of Medicine
University of Connecticut School of Medicine
Director, Echocardiography Laboratory
Hartford Hospital
Hartford, Connecticut

William J. Stewart, MD, FACC, FASE
Professor of Medicine
Director, Cardiovascular Curriculum
Cleveland Clinic Lerner College of Medicine
Staff Cardiologist
Department of Cardiovascular Medicine
Heart and Vascular Institute
Cleveland Clinic
Cleveland, Ohio

Lissa Sugeng, MD, MPH
Associate Professor of Medicine
Section of Cardiovascular Medicine
Yale School of Medicine
New Haven, CT

Imran S. Syed, MD
Instructor in Medicine
College of Medicine
Senior Associate Consultant
Division of Cardiovascular Diseases
Mayo Clinic
Rochester, Minnesota

Dennis A. Tighe, MD
Professor
Department of Medicine
UMass Medical School
Associate Director
Non-invasive Cardiology
UMass-Memorial Medical Center
Worcester, Massachusetts

David Verhaert, MD
Staff Cardiologist
Ziekenhuis Oost-Limburg
Genk, Belgium

Shepard D. Weiner, MD
Clinical Fellow
Department of Medicine—Cardiology
New York Presbyterian Hospital
Columbia University Medical Center
New York, New York

Lynn Weinert, BS, RDCS
Sonographer
Department of Cardiology
University of Chicago
Chicago, Illinois

Omar Weaver-Pinzon, MD
Division of Cardiology
St. Luke's-Roosevelt Hospital Center
Columbia University, College of Physicians & Surgeons
New York, New York

Andrew O. Zurick III, MD
Cardiac Imaging Fellow
Department of Cardiovascular Medicine
Heart and Vascular Institute
Cleveland Clinic
Cleveland, Ohio
The field of cardiovascular ultrasound had experienced a progressive increase in technical capability and clinical application. The earliest texts on echocardiography dealt only with M-mode tracings, while the most recent versions include two- and three-dimensional imaging as well as blood and tissue Doppler recordings. Not surprisingly, the size of these texts has increased proportionately, representing a challenge to anyone who seeks to master every aspect of cardiac ultrasound. Not surprisingly, new approaches to teaching/learning echocardiography have been sought.

One of the time honored techniques for transmitting information in the clinical setting employs the Socratic method. Whether on rounds or in a laboratory or operating room, attending physicians traditionally pose questions to their trainees about the cases they are overseeing. The concept is that one will best remember that information which they were unable to provide in response to a question. This method also enables the teacher to assess the student and, importantly, enables the trainee to assess their own knowledge and direct future educational efforts.

The current text by Klein, Asher and coauthors exploits the attributes of the Socratic method as an educational tool for cardiac ultrasound. Each aspect of echocardiography is covered by a series of questions which calibrates one's knowledge of the field. More importantly, the explanations of the correct answers provide new information in a format that will not likely be soon forgotten. Many of the questions are based upon actual images and recordings, simulating the setting in which this knowledge would be needed clinically. The net effect is to keep one's interest with challenging queries and immediately enforce the acquisition of new information.

There is little doubt that cardiac ultrasound will continue to progress and play an increasing role in clinical care. In addition, the availability of small handheld devices should expand the application of echocardiography to noncardiologists. Thus, there will be a continuing need for tools to transmit information and to enable self-assessment. The text by Klein, Asher and coauthors serves that purpose very well and is a welcome addition to the cardiac ultrasound literature.

Anthony DeMaria
Judith and Jack White Chair in Cardiology
University of California, San Diego
Editor-in-Chief, Journal of the American College of Cardiology
San Diego, California
In 1953, Swedish physician Dr. Inge Edler, using an industrial ultrasound device, generated the first images of the human heart and published his experience the following year in a manuscript entitled “The use of ultrasonic reflectoscope for continuous recording of the movements of heart valves.” The next five decades have seen an unrelenting series of advances in the imaging modality, soon named “echocardiography” by its proponents. Amplitude mode imaging gave way to two-dimensional (2D) echocardiography, then 3D echocardiography, Doppler imaging, transesophageal imaging, contrast ultrasound, tissue Doppler, and much more. What began as an exercise in scientific curiosity eventually transformed the profession of cardiovascular medicine, becoming, without question, the most important noninvasive diagnostic technique used in the practice of cardiology.

However, with each passing decade, the challenges of mastering echocardiography have become increasingly daunting for each new generation of students and practitioners. The physicists who develop ultrasound equipment have been astonishingly creative, devising increasingly complex mathematical approaches to ultrasound imaging that empower practitioners with increasingly powerful diagnostic tools. However, the price we pay for technological advances are the formidable obstacles to learning how to apply echocardiography in clinical practice. Dr. Allan Klein and his coauthors, top leaders and educators in this field, have sought to make learning of echocardiography easier and, frankly, more fun.

This learning tool does not attempt to educate the reader in detail about the physics of ultrasound or the nuances of esoteric research. Rather, this text uses a more user-friendly approach based upon the “question and answer” approach to education. Both educators and students, when interviewed, invariably favor such an approach. I own several textbooks of ultrasound that I keep next to my bed in case I suffer from insomnia. A few minutes of reading is usually all it takes for me to fall asleep. That cannot happen with the “Clinical Review of Echocardiography.” Using a question and answer format, the reader is engaged from the very beginning. The questions cover a range of difficulty that allows the beginner and advanced student to increase their knowledge and self-confidence. The problem-oriented learning is particularly appealing because it simulates the clinical environment so well that it is easy to forget that you are reading a textbook.

The topics covered range from the mundane to the esoteric, including basic imaging methods, such as systolic function assessment, as well as sophisticated areas such as optimization of cardiac resynchronization therapy. Although not a substitute for a comprehensive reference book, this textbook is ideal for review and re-certification. It is equally useful for individuals who want to assess their skills or increase their knowledge to keep pace with the advancing technology of echocardiographic imaging. Of equal importance, you will find that this approach is simply a fun way to learn. Once you start, you may have trouble putting this book aside.

Steven Nissen, MD, MACC
Chairman, Department of Cardiovascular Medicine
Staff, Molecular Cardiology
Director, Joseph J. Jacobs Center for Thrombosis and Vascular Biology
Department of Cardiovascular Medicine
Heart and Vascular Institute
Cleveland Clinic
Cleveland, Ohio
We are delighted with this new interactive and contemporary textbook entitled *Clinical Echocardiography Review: A Self-Assessment Tool*. In 2011, echocardiography is seeing a major renaissance in interest and growth. We are now in the modern era of miniaturization, 3D and dyssynchrony echocardiography, speckle tracking, real-time TEE, and molecular imaging with contrast. At the same time, reimbursement for imaging is decreasing and there is competing technology. The busy clinician and fellow have to keep up with the latest in the changing clinical practice of echocardiography. This book focuses on the time tested way of “the Socratic method” to teach the key concepts to busy clinical cardiologists, fellows, anesthesiologists, and sonographers using a multiple-choice question & answer format. The book will emphasize diagnostic interpretation rather than clinical management.

This book is comprehensive with 28 state-of-the-art chapters ranging from fundamentals to new technologies. The format of each chapter is standardized with three types of questions. At the beginning, there are simple questions followed by an answer. Then, questions associated with a still frame graphic (M-mode, 2D, or a 3D) come next and are followed by an answer. Finally, questions are presented involving case studies associated with several questions based on movies and still frames. The reader will need to go to the Web site to work with these questions in either study mode or test mode.

We have chosen leading national and international experts as well as educators in the field of echocardiography. We will cover the basics from a sonographer approach to the echocardiography examination, physics and artifacts to more clinically oriented topics including atrial fibrillation, prosthetic valves, cardiomyopathies, and pericardial disease and then new technologies such as dyssynchrony assessment, strain, and strain rate. We have emphasized key take home points after each of the cases. This book uses the question & answer method which is similar to how we teach our fellows to read echocardiograms. Also, it will be useful for the clinical cardiologist who wants to hone their echocardiographic skills in day-to-day practice.

*Clinical Echocardiography Review: A Self-Assessment Tool* may be the largest echocardiography review book out there with over 1,000 questions and answers as well as key references for each chapter. There are ample graphs, tables and figures, and detailed explanations to answer the questions.

We hope that you enjoy the basics as well as the “latest and greatest” of echocardiography in the 21st century.

*Allan L. Klein and Craig R. Asher*
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