By Yolanda D. Heman-Ackah, Robert T. Sataloff, and Mary J Hawkshaw.
Science & Medicine, Narberth PA, May 2013.
166 pages, 7 x 10 in., color, $24.99 (paperback).

Add to your library this important guide to the care of the human voice. The three contributing authors are especially qualified to offer information on the subject. Anyone who has had association with the Voice Foundation in recent years will recognize them as experts and leaders in the voice community. They are regularly contributing authors and presenters at conferences on the voice around the globe.

The stated purpose of the book is to be “a guide to common medical problems that can affect the voice and to common vocal difficulties that can develop from ineffective voice use.” It is also stated that “it is purposely designed to be easy to read and is intended for non-medical voice professionals.” It is this reviewer’s opinion that the authors achieved their stated goals. Scientific and medical jargon is kept to a minimum, and this makes for a readily accessible resource for the voice community.

The book begins with obligatory chapters on the basic anatomy and physiology of the larynx, on the underlying principles of voice production including phonation, resonance, and breath management. All thorough enough but not too detailed. There are many photographs throughout the book that should prove to be valuable resource materials to all of us. The original artwork, however, is presented with muted pastel colors and challenges the eye to discern the details of the anatomical structures presented. Eleven short chapters follow that discuss vocal longevity, how to find a good voice team for yourself or your students, and recommendations concerning when to see or refer to a specialist. Other chapters discuss the possible causes of voice problems, reflux and how to treat it, and some recommendations concerning non-surgical and surgical remedies for vocal disorders.

While containing valuable information, the book seems to suffer from a lack of a good editorial review. There are several places where exactly the same paragraph (word-by-word) appears in multiple places. Other unfortunate errors are noted: on pg. 20 in the discussion on resonance it states: “The vocal tract has four or five important harmonic frequencies called ‘formants’. This is of course a common error in confusing the concept of a resonance (a formant) with an harmonic: part of the overtone series which comes from the vibrating vocal folds! I try desperately to make sure my pedagogy students do not make this error! It goes on to say: “Amplification of the voice occurs primarily in the oral cavity, which has a megaphone-like effect on vocal projection.” The entire vocal tract resonates the partials from the larynx and we have known this since Manuel Garcia II described that the pharynx modifies the sound produced by the larynx to produce what we hear as the voice. It is difficult for singers and teachers to learn and keep these concepts straight in our minds. To find these errors in print is discouraging! The discussion on hormone replacement therapy gives no acknowledgment to a medically guided bio-identical approach to this important issue, warning only of over-the-counter sources of estrogens. Of course, HRT must be guided by a qualified physician. There is plenty of evidence that the pharmaceutically produced hormones cause the problems associated with HRT. There is also plenty of evidence that the bio-identical alternatives do not.

I think this book is a valuable resource to the voice world. Personally, I can see using it as a supplemental text for a pedagogy class, but it should be on the bookshelf of any informed voice teacher or performer.

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