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The Anaesthesia Science Viva Book

Clinical science as applied to anaesthesia,
intensive therapy and chronic pain
A guide to the oral questions

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Preface

The Final FRCA examination has a daunting syllabus which is tested by a multiple choice paper, by written short answer questions, and by two oral examinations, one in clinical anaesthesia, and a second in applied basic clinical science. This book is intended to give you some insight into how the clinical science viva works, along with some general guidance as to how to improve your chances of passing. More importantly it aims to provide you with a wide range of potential questions which contain, nonetheless, a manageable amount of information.

The introduction explains the format of the viva, outlines how the questions are constructed, conducted and marked, and offers some advice about technique. The questions then which follow, which are typical of those which have appeared, are divided broadly into the four areas which the examination is designed to cover, namely applied anatomy, physiology, pharmacology and clinical measurement. One section, entitled 'Miscellaneous Science and Medicine' includes a number of subjects which do not fall readily into any of the other categories.

You may notice that there is some overlap in content with the companion volume, 'Short Answer Questions in Anaesthesia'. Where this has happened I have reworked the answers both to give more detail and to focus the topic more specifically towards the oral part of the examination, but a degree of duplication in one or two of the questions is inevitable.

The answers have been constructed to provide you with enough information to pass the viva, but as I have had to be selective in the detail that has been included they cannot claim to be complete accounts of the subjects. This means that in some areas you may notice various omissions, but none I hope so egregious that your chances of success will be ruined. Each of the questions is prefaced by a short commentary on the relevance (or otherwise) of the subject that is being asked. There follows the body of the answer to the likely areas of questioning. This is presented mainly in the form of bulleted, but detailed points, which include supporting explanation. These are written in text rather than as lists, because I felt that this format would make the book easier to read. If some of the questions seem long, then it is either because the background information is complex, or because they contain enough material for more than one viva topic.

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Even in a structured examination a viva may take an unforeseen course, and so the answers also include some possible directions which the questioning might follow. Although each one is intended to provide details more than sufficient to allow you to pass, in many cases they are simplified, and it is always possible that some examiners may ask part of the question in more depth than can be covered in a book of this size. There are 150 specimen questions in this book, and on the day of the examination you will be asked only four. Odds of about 40 to 1 or less do not provide a huge incentive for study, but I should hope that some of the material would be relevant to your anaesthetic practice. The material that you do find of little clinical relevance may at least prove of some future use as in due course you guide less experienced colleagues through the FRCA.

I promised my family that I would never again succumb to the temptation of writing a book. I lied. To my wife and three boys, therefore, my love and thanks for all their patience and support.

Simon Bricker
2004