Rheumatology in Practice
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This book is intended primarily for medical students, interns, residents in rheumatology, orthopedics and physical medicine (physiatry), and general practitioners interested in improving their ability to deal with rheumatic diseases.

We have essentially chosen to present practical, clinical guidance, departing from the symptoms, signs and clinical patterns, to approach the most appropriate diagnostic strategies and choice of treatment, rather than giving a classical explanation of the different diseases. Our essential goal is to provide our readers with a strategy for clinical investigation and differential diagnosis. The book is therefore based on real clinical experience, and we have attempted to include the methods of clinical reasoning that we consider most helpful.

How well this works will, however, depend on our readers’ willingness to collaborate and commit themselves. We suggest that you pay particular attention to the clinical cases and accept the challenge they present. First, read the initial description, think about the questions asked, and then compare your solution with the one that we have adopted. Many of the cases may seem rather exhaustive. We would like to stress, however, that a concise and rigorous presentation of a case represents already the most important task of the physician, which resides in the ability to question, to listen, to observe, to appraise and integrate the information gathered. This is a doctor’s most difficult task, and that is why we encourage your active participation as much as possible. This is also why we have avoided the cases that might seem simple and obvious: they are rarely like that in the real world they come from.

Some of the questions we ask about the cases may be too difficult to answer on the first reading, like those concerning treatment, for example. We feel, however, that they will constitute an important contribution to the learning of more experienced physicians, and to training and testing skills during a second reading.

This book is in no way intended to be exhaustive. Fundamental aspects like the pathophysiology of rheumatic diseases, the study of uncommon presentations or complications, or the specialized treatment of each disease are best served by more classical descriptive textbooks. Their inclusion in this book would stand in the way of the pedagogical and practical guidance that we aim to give here. We suggest that any readers who are interested in these aspects should consult some of the wide variety of available books.

In this manual, the different rheumatic diseases have been grouped on the basis of their clinical pattern, and not by the usual classification. The objective is to facilitate recalling of each situation in the appropriate context of differential diagnosis.

The general sequence of the chapters is arranged on a clinical basis. We believe that readers interested in getting a general instruction in rheumatology will reap the greatest benefits if they read the chapters in order. Even if the reader is interested in studying a specific disease, we would advise to start with an integrated approach to the clinical basis of rheumatology, which allows a correct interpretation of signs and symptoms (Chapters 4 and 5), in the context of the classification of common rheumatological syndromes (Chapter 3), and inflammatory arthropiditis (Chapter 17).

It is our hope that both you and your patients will take great benefit from this book.

Any criticisms, comments or suggestions on this work are most welcome (jdasilva@ci.uc.pt).

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