“The thinking surgeon”. Oil on canvas. By Dan Schein
http://danschein.com/home.html
Schein’s
Common Sense
Emergency
Abdominal Surgery

An unconventional book for trainees and thinking surgeons

Third Edition

With 133 Figures and 30 Tables
MS dedicates this book to his late father Karl Schein, a surgeon on the Eastern front during World War II and later in Haifa, Israel.

Karl Schein, 1911–1974
This book has been assembled—in pieces—during long years of intensive personal involvement, clinical and academic, urban and rural, with emergency abdominal surgery in South Africa, Israel, USA, UK, and Australia.

A long line of good old friends from all around the world were helpful in generating this book and its two preceding editions. For the foundations in this noble surgical field, MS is indebted to George G. Decker of Johannesburg. Drs. Asher Hirshberg and Adam Klipfel contributed to the first edition. Dr. Alfredo Sepulveda of Santiago, Chile, edited the Spanish translation (first edition); Dr. Francesco Vittorio Gammarota of Rome, Italy, edited the Italian translation (second edition), and we will remember with affection the late Professor Boris Savchuk of Moscow who edited the Russian translation (first edition). We are grateful to the many members of SURGINET, who over the years have stimulated our brains with their constant international feedback. Thanks also to Dr. Slava Ryndine, South Africa, for the help with the caricatures, to Roger Saadia for his stimulating criticism, and to Rob Lane for superb editorial input. Thanks to Dr. Evgeny (Perya) Perelygin who drew additional caricatures for this edition and to Dan Schein who painted the image on one of the pages.

Special thanks to ladies Gabriele Schroeder and Stephanie Benko of Springer, Heidelberg, for their immense support. Most of the aphorisms and quotations used to decorate this book were retrieved from Aphorisms & Quotations for the Surgeon (2002) and A Companion to Aphorisms & Quotations for the Surgeon (2008), edited by MS and published by Nikki Bramhill’s tfm Publishing, Harley, UK.

The reader will find that there are a few duplications scattered throughout the book. We did this on purpose, as repetition of important points is crucial in adult education. Any reader who has a question or a comment about anything to do with this book is invited to e mail us directly: mschein1@mindspring.com, pn.rogers@btinternet.com, assaliaa@gmail.com. We will respond.
Editors’ Note

Finally, we are indebted to our loving wives, Heidi, Jackie, and Anat and our children Omri, Yariv, Dan, Lucy, Michael, Razi, May, and Adam, for their patience and sacrifice.

January 2010

Moshe Schein, Wisconsin
Paul N. Rogers, Glasgow
Ahmad Assalia, Haifa
Preface to the Third Edition

“In literature, as in love, we are astonished as what is chosen by others.” (Andre Maurois, 1885-1967)

We are proud to present the third edition of this book, which since it first appeared almost 10 years ago, has become a favorite with surgeons having to deal with emergency abdominal surgery.

Is there anything new in this field that merits the revision and update of such a book every 4–5 years? Yes. Our practice has been gradually changing for the better and worse. Where we practice—in the “developed world”—the volume and spectrum of emergency surgery are declining and becoming narrower. Where any abdominal grumble is followed by a CT scan or any fart by a colonoscopy, ruptured aortic aneurysm and acute malignant colonic obstruction are becoming rarities. When most asymptomatic inguinal hernias undergo elective repair, one does not see many strangulated or obstructed groin hernias. When the entire population is being fed, or buys at the counter, anti-ulcer medications, operations for bleeding, or perforated ulcer are hardly ever performed. This, however, may not be true in other parts of the world where you have the fortune (or misfortune) to practice.

The way we practice emergency surgery has also been rapidly evolving. With almost unlimited access to abdominal imaging, we can rapidly pinpoint the diagnosis and avoid an unnecessary operation, or perform an indicated operation instead of engaging in a prolonged period of uncertainty. We are gradually becoming more selective and cautious—understanding that everything we do involves wielding a double-edged sword, and that in emergency surgery usually doing less is better but occasionally doing more may be life-saving. Meanwhile fancy diagnostic modalities are used chaotically by our nonsurgical colleagues (and some of our surgical ones)—producing red herrings or new “image diseases,” “incidentalomas,” and adding to the general confusion.

In this brave new world of changes, we need constantly to update ourselves. We have to re-learn how to deal with the old s**t—which is becoming rare—even when its odor is masked by the perfume of modern practice. And this is what we
continue doing in this new edition—reciting the written-in-stone sacred, old basics but also showing how to integrate them in the evolving modern world.

**What is new in the Third Edition?** We have a new co-editor (AA), an advanced laparoscopic surgeon, who took it upon himself to emphasize the “laparoscopic perspective” of the various chapters. We added new chapters (viz., complications of laparoscopic surgery, complications of bariatric surgery, complications of peritoneal dialysis, leaks after colorectal surgery, urological emergencies, abdominal emergencies in the “third world”), and “invited commentaries,” by new contributors. All contributors are well known to us personally as experts in their field. All existing chapters have been revised, expanded, or re-written by the old or new contributors and/or the editors. Each chapter has been carefully scrutinized by us, its style and tone tuned to conform to the overall “voice” of the book.

From the beginning, we knew that a book like this—written in practical, colloquial, and direct in-your-face style will be either loved or hated. And indeed, a few reviewers—appalled by dogmas that clash with their own, and language not exactly conforming to Strunk and White’s *The Elements of Style*—almost killed it. But many more loved it. In the preface to the second edition, we have cited from the many complimentary reviews and the enthusiastic feedback we have received from surgical readers around the world—we will not cite from it again. Even now, after 9 years in print, we continue to receive enthusiastic feedback from satisfied new readers. For example:

- “I have personally to admit that Schein’s *Common Sense Emergency Abdominal Surgery* was on many surgical calls often my best and only friend. Furthermore, it helps me till today to guide my own teaching to students and residents…” (Pascal O. Berberat Staff Surgeon/Faculty, Klinikum rechts der Isar, Munich).
- “I just wanted to express my gratefulness for your “Common Sense.” I am an attending surgeon in a General Hospital in the South of Germany and bought your book as soon as I could get hold of it (which is quite difficult—always sold out!), and was never able to read in whole myself—because it is always, always, always with the residents who “live” on it. You and your team became our “surplus” senior attending colleagues and taught a lot—the residents and us!” (Margita Geiger, Attending Surgeon, Ansbach, Bavaria, Germany).
- “In your book I read this sentence: ‘Surgeons are internists who operate.’ I just wish to tell you that such a sentence has definitely illuminated my brain and the wisdom and brightness of your philosophy about the surgical method (against the frequent stupidity of the usual surgical mind, at least in my country) are guiding my working days as a young emergency surgeon.” (Carlo Bergamini, MD, PhD, Florence, Italy).

By popular demand the first edition of this book has been translated into Spanish and Russian and the second edition into Italian (by Dr. Francesco V. Gammarota).
German and Czech translations are underway. Motivated by the enthusiasm with which the book is being received across the world—particularly among those practicing “real surgery” in the “real world”—we set about enhancing it to produce a text that should be palatable to all of you—wherever you try to save lives—be it in Mumbai, Karachi, Cairo, Belgrade, Soweto, Mexico City, Kiev, Copenhagen, Philadelphia, Glasgow, Krakow, and yes, even in Paris (we hope there are French surgeons who can, and want to, read English 😊)

If you are a surgeon who practices the way he was trained 20 or 30 years ago, you will hate this book; if you are being trained by such a surgeon then you desperately need to read this book.

Dr. Anton Chekhov said: “Doctors are just the same as lawyers; the only difference is that lawyers merely rob you, whereas doctors rob you and kill you, too.” Our chief aim in writing this book was to help you not kill your patients. This nonorthodox book is not yet another tedious, full-of-details textbook. We do not need more of these. It is aimed at you, the young practicing surgeon who desires a focused and friendly approach to emergency abdominal surgery. We hope and believe that this modest book will be of some value to you.

The Editors: Rogers is the one in the kilt; the one puffing on a stogie is Assalia.

Moshe Schein
Paul N. Rogers
Ahmad Assalia
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