INTERPRETING

THE

MEDICAL

LITERATURE

CONTENTS

riciace		5. 2
CHAPTER ONE		
TASTING AN ARTICLE		. 1
Validity 3		
Reasons to Read 4		
The Bones of an Article 6		
Approaching an Article 9		
CHAPTER TWO		
STUDY DESIGN:		
GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS		4
Descriptive Studies 15		
Explanatory Studies 18		
More Confusing Terminology 27		
Summary 32		
CHAPTER THREE		
STUDY DESIGN:		
THE CASE-CONTROL APPROA	ACH3	34
Advantages of the Case-Control Design	1 <i>35</i>	
Problems of Case-Control Designs	<i>36</i>	
Summary 51		

CHAPTER FOUR
STUDY DESIGN: THE CROSS-SECTIONAL AND FOLLOW-UP APPROACHES55
Cross-Sectional Designs 57 Follow-up Studies 67 Summary 74
CHAPTER FIVE
STUDY DESIGN: THE EXPERIMENTAL APPROACH78
Subjects: Who Gets in 79 Controls: Their Presence and Comparability 87 The Intervention or Treatment 93 Allocation: Subject Assignment 99 Attrition 104
End Points 106
Summary 107
CHAPTER SIX
MAKING MEASUREMENTS111
Reliability and Validity 112 Variability of the Unsystematic Sort 113 Systematic Error 116 Controlling Measurement Error 122 Summary 124
CHAPTER SEVEN
INTERPRETATION: DISTRIBUTIONS, AVERAGES, AND THE NORMAL
Frequency Distributions 128 Measures of Central Tendency 130 Indicators of Variability 132 Normality 134 Regression to the Mean 140 Summary 143

CHAPTER EIGHT
INTERPRETATION:
STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANCE145
Inference 146
Sampling Variability 147
The Null Hypothesis and Statistical Significance 148
Some Problems of Statistical Significance 149
Beta Errors and Statistical Power 154
Confidence Intervals 156
Testing for Statistical Significance May Be Irrelevant 157
Summary 159
CHAPTER NINE
INTERPRETATION:
SOME STATISTICAL TESTS161
Tests for Continuous Data 166
Correlation 169
Regression 171
Summary 176
CHAPTER TEN
INTERPRETATION: SENSITIVITY, SPECIFICITY,
AND PREDICTIVE VALUE178
Prevalence 184
Making Choices 187
Multiple Tests 188
Spectrum 193
Standards 194
Cost Considerations 196
Summary 198
CHAPTER ELEVEN
INTERPRETATION: RISK
Statements of Risk 202
Relative Risk 203
Relative Risk and Study Design 204

viii Contents

Attributable Risk 209
Balancing Risks 210
Summary 212
CHAPTER TWELVE
INTERPRETATION: CAUSES214
Confounding 215
Dealing with Confounding 218
Making Associations into Causes 223
Summary 229
CHAPTER THIRTEEN
CASE SERIES, EDITORIALS,
AND REVIEWS231
Case Series 232
Editorials and Letters to the Editor 239
Reviews 243
Summary 249
CHAPTER FOURTEEN
A FINÁL WORD252
Clarity 253
Apologies, Tentative Conclusions, Self-Criticism, and the Like 255
The Final Word 256
Summary 258
Index