Book Reviews


The 'Annual Review' series has been appearing since 1932. In each issue distinguished experts are invited to contribute critical articles reviewing significant developments within each major discipline. This year there are 42 papers on a wide variety of subjects. The authors are largely from the United States, but there are excellent chapters from the Hammersmith on the supraventricular tachycardias and St Thomas' on antiphospholipid antibodies. Each article is heavily referenced mainly from the American literature. For example an instructive article on carotid artery disease and its surgical treatment has no less than 166 references. Most references date up to 1987 and have been selected carefully.

This book is an ideal update on many disparate topics. An article on silent myocardial ischaemia is sandwiched between the transdermal delivery of drugs and a review of current views on thrombotic thrombocytopenic purpura. This is both the strength and weakness of this type of publication. The choice of subjects is so varied that one is not sure what sort of person would buy the book. Certainly libraries should have a copy. Although individuals might only be interested in a few of the topics discussed, physicians should read it, if only to discover their ignorance of important areas of medical practice and to read excellent updates on many of the clinical problems that they see in daily practice.

J.J. Hamblin
12 Chadwick Road,
Westcliff-on-Sea,
Essex.


It is a measure of the intense interest in gastrointestinal immunology that another book on the subject can appear which is not only enjoyable to read but is able to transmit new information. Drs Heyworth and Jones have assembled excellent contributions from a distinguished team. The majority of the book deals with basic immune mechanisms of the gastrointestinal tract. Thus the priming of B cells within Peyer's patches, the homing of such cells back into the lamina propria and the mechanisms of synthesizing secretory immunoglobulin are well reviewed. This is amplified by a clear update on the mechanisms of lymphocyte migration and the elegant demonstration of lymphocyte surface receptors for ligands on the endothelial cells of the post capillary venules. Other chapters deal with oral tolerance, intestinal mast cells, the role of cytokines in local immune responses, and the nature and function of intestinal macrophages. The genetic control of the immune response, with particular reference to the gastrointestinal tract, is given a separate chapter.

In all the chapters, the authors are careful to specify species variation, and in particular, to underline what is known concerning the immunology of the human intestine. Most chapters try to relate how human disease might be initiated by a disturbance in normal immune function but this often highlights the enormous gulf between our knowledge of normal function in experimental animals and clinical disease. This inability to describe pathogenetic mechanisms underlying disease states is emphasized further by the final chapters on the immunology of intestinal tumours and the role of auto-immunity.

This book will be tough going for the general clinician but it is a goldmine of information and an excellent introduction into the literature for those interested in the subject or who are seeking answers to specific questions concerning mucosal immunity. The editors are to be congratulated on producing such a readable account.

D.P. Jewell
Gastroenterology Unit,
Radcliffe Infirmary,
Oxford OX2 6HE.


With books on bedside diagnosis it is never totally clear whether the book is intended to be bedside reading or taken to the patient's bedside as an aid to diagnostic examination. However, with this book, I feel that the latter is the intention though it will prove - at 4.5 cm thick - a weighty addition to the student or house officer's pocket. Will it be worth carrying?

The book is apparently aimed at students to enable them better to elicit and interpret symptoms and signs; and later 'as house officers and seasoned practitioners, this portable companion should remind the physician of symptoms and signs to seek and diseases to consider in formulating a differential diagnosis of the problems confronting him in the office and hospital'. This sentence gives a flavour of the American perspective of this book, a matter of some relevance in language and content. The book was originally written over 20 years ago by the late Elmer L. DeGowin and is now carried on by his son who is Professor of Internal Medicine at the University of Iowa College of Medicine. In the preface to this fifth edition he writes: 'Many more physicians have entered an increasingly competitive practice, in a system with strong pressures to reduce the costs of highly technological medical care . . .'; perhaps some British relevance here. The book is described as '1000-plus pages of tightly organized information' and the original format of earlier editions has been maintained. In the first part (chapters 2-10, occupying 840 pages) a systematic approach to diagnosis, using the classical elicitation of symptoms and signs is described in a structured and readily followed format. After a brief general account of history-taking and examination, more detailed descriptions follow in the order 'as they are encountered by the physician who conducts the physical examination from head to foot of the patient'.

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