**Book reviews**

**Cystic fibrosis**


The treatment of patients with cystic fibrosis (CF) is best left to specialist centres, but as the number of patients is increasing rapidly (a fact which this book points out on several occasions), most practising physicians will now come across these unfortunate individuals from time to time. Thus, the concept of a concise and up-to-date volume on cystic fibrosis aimed at the non-specialist doctor is to be welcomed, and this book makes a laudable attempt at providing such a text.

The chapters on the overall management of children and adults are well thought out, as are those on lung infection, the CF gene, and lung transplantation. However, the chapters on the CF mouse and lung injury are far too detailed and largely irrelevant for the non-specialist, which is perhaps on the gastrointestinal tract does not even mention fibrosing colopathy, and that on psychosocial aspects pays little attention to the very important topic of transition of care from the paediatric to the adult world.

Also, I would have liked to see more on the important problems of the management of pregnancy in the CF patient, the treatment of male infertility, how to diagnose CF in the adult patient, and the mechanics of home intravenous therapy.

Despite these shortcomings, the book provides a very readable overview of current thinking on CF management and can be recommended to non-specialist medical professionals.

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**Diabetic retinopathy**


The first author is probably the most experienced treatet of diabetic retinopathy in this country, and also one of the most charismatic teachers of the subject of this book. It was with happy anticipation that I started my reading. Sadly, the book was a great disappointment.

But first, what is good and interesting. The chapter on lasers is informative, though it does suffer from unnecessary repetition. It was good to see a section on the preparation of the patient and the explanation of the treatment. The advantages and disadvantages of the different wavelengths is interesting, but perhaps it should have been emphasised that, for the treatment of most diabetic retinopathy, almost any of the photoocoagulator lasers will achieve the desired result.

Appendix II with the flow chart is very useful, and probably the best part of the book. It should go into the pocket of young doctors learning about diabetic retinopathy. The treatment section is also good in parts. It tends to be somewhat dogmatic, and many will disagree with some of the statements. Thus most people would not find it mandatory to treat all cases with macular oedema but good visual acuity. There is no real evidence that proliferative lesions in NIDD are more responsive to treatment, or that treatment of ischaemic maculopathy will increase the area of non-perfusion. It is a great pity that florid retinopathy, a rare but blinding condition mentioned in the flow chart, is not discussed in the text.

The chapters on epidemiology and risk factors are poor and in places inaccurate. The authors are more than a little uncertain about pathogenic mechanisms, and the difference between insulin-treated and insulin-requiring patients, anatomical and functional lesions. The description of the lesions is poor and undue emphasis is put on rarities. At present there is no real evidence that macular oedema comes from leaky pigment epithelium. The example shown is one of transmission defect, rather than leakage. Sheet haemorrhages are not a feature of diabetic retinopathy, and the patient they demonstrate indeed has retinal branch vein occlusion. Treatment is sometimes included in this section, eg, by pretreatment haemorrhages and cataract. This is then later discussed again, causing some confusion.

Two of the authors did not experience the pre-laser period. They therefore do not know the natural history of lesions. It is sad that not a single publication dealing with this topic is included. This means further reading is required. Indeed the references list directing us to further reading is parochial and incomplete.

It is a pity the authors did not keep their title and write about what they know and are good at.

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**Epidemiology of ageing**


This book is a large curate's egg with over 400 pages and nearly 50 contributors from nine different countries. There has been a tendency to be over inclusive and this has led to some subjects not being usefully developed. For example, the opening chapter on mechanisms of ageing is so truncated that it fails to do the subject justice and could best have been omitted. The first section covers ageing and health care from a broad epidemiological perspective and is the best part of the book. There is a good critical review (Ebrahim) of the limitations and cautions required in the interpretation of epidemiological data in relation to ageing. This is followed by accounts from non-European perspectives clearly showing that rapid changes in developing nations and slower changes in developed nations are leading to a 'world village' of older people and mutual shared problems. The pre-eminence of cardiovascular disease across the world is clearly brought out.

The descriptions of epidemiological methods are tedious for the clinician. Health economists (Farrar and Donaldson), in an upbeat presentation, change the 'can we afford' argument to 'are we prepared to reallocate from within the health budget' to meet the growing demand of an ageing population. The cost with within the (inadequate) budget is thus returned to the Health Service for an answer, not the politician. Gender differences in survival are discussed in various sections and at various levels. The paradox that female longevity is higher than that of males, has excess mortality – or as it is neatly put by Sen, 'women get sick, men die' – is not adequately addressed. For example, there is no discussion of gender survival differences in utero and their reversal by birth. The final section of the book deals with specific diseases. If contributors had confined their offerings to purely epidemiological aspects, the book would have been better and shorter. Discussions of pathology and of treatment are better covered in other textbooks.

Who should purchase this book? Any lecturer requiring an epidemiological introduction to a presentation has information leaping from the page. Similarly, applicants for research grants in the ageing field can usefully bolster their arguments. Clinicians and students reading the book will be aware of the impact of an ageing population and how we could respond.

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**Record keeping**


This 14 page booklet is produced by the Kent MAAG following an audit of 100 practices in 1994. It is short, well-structured and covers all the important areas to do with the medical record and the medical record-keeping process. In particular it addresses issues such as the electronic record, summaries and pruning of files. It also contains the secret of how to file A4 letters into a Lloyd George envelope! All members of the primary health team and GP registrars would benefit from reading this publication. The section about computerised records was a bit lightweight but otherwise I found it a helpful reminder and guide. I am still smiling about the anecdote about the hapless GP who amended 'silly old bat' to 'still holds bottle' when the records were requested by a solicitor.

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