Book Reviews

The Renin–Angiotensin System, Vols 1 and 2, edited by J. Ian S. Robertson and M. Gary Nicholls. Pp. Vol. 1, xvi + chs. 1–51, Vol. 2, xvi + chs 52–100, illustrated. Gower Medical Publishing, Kent, 1993. Hardback, £150.00.

The Renin–Angiotensin System is a remarkable achievement. Here within two handsomely produced volumes are scholarly and readable accounts, richly referenced, of the historical development of our understanding of the RAS and the current state of knowledge and uncertainty. Volume 1 deals with biochemistry and physiology and Volume 2 with pathophysiology and therapeutics.

Thanks to the editorial arm-twisting detailed in the preface and liberal cross-referencing the 100 chapters are extremely well integrated with very little duplication.

Whilst inevitably the book will be of special value for clinicians in hypertension, nephrology and endocrinology, there are few in other specialties who will not find chapters of interest.

The editors are to be congratulated for having produced an instant classic. No medical library or self-respecting department of nephrology, endocrinology and others should be without their 'Robertson and Nicholls'.

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Coping Successfully with Prostate Problems, R. Reynolds. Pp. 134, illustrated. Sheldon Press, London, 1993. Paperback £5.99.

This book attempts to explain in lay terms the urinary symptom complex caused by prostatic enlargement, how the symptoms are investigated and the treatment options available. Almost half the book then addresses the operation of prostatectomy, that is, chapters on waiting for surgery, your hospital stay, and your recovery at home. If this book is written to be read by men with bladder outflow obstruction due to BPH then my major complaint is the persistent use of the word 'pee'. What is wrong with the term 'to pass urine'? That is what patients actually say to their medical adviser. There are some terms used, for example, 'microscopic' that would not be understood by the average patient and are not explained in the glossary or index. The advice to the reader with symptoms to write them all down on a piece of paper to produce at the time of consultation is not a good idea. This is almost guaranteed to cause the heart of any clinician to sink and is well described by our colleagues over the channel as '*the maladie de petit papier*'. In the chapter dealing with 'your hospital stay' it is carefully explained why certain questions are asked by the surgeon and their importance even if repetitive. The value of the

careful history is then totally negated by stating that it is the tea ladies who asked the most pertinent questions. This might just upset the dedicated urological team concerned with the patients' management. This book, however, is not of course directed to them, but I wonder whether the average man awaiting prostatectomy would necessarily tackle a paperback of this size.

This is very readable, well researched and contains a lot of common sense, practical advice and information. Perhaps, the 'nurse learner', as student or pupil nurses are now called, might prove to be the best market for this book.

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MCQs for the F.R.C.S. Examinations in Applied Basic Sciences, J. Pegington, F.J. Imms, D.R. Davies and P.B. Boulos. Pp. 105, illustrated. Hodder & Stoughton, Kent, 1993. Paperback, £12.99.

This book provides a useful bank of 175 MCQs in anatomy, physiology, pathology and surgery. It is designed for the F.R.C.S. examinations, but many of the questions are equally appropriate for undergraduate medical examinations in these subjects. They will therefore prove useful to staff setting a range of MCQ examinations as well as to candidates preparing for the F.R.C.S. As the authors point out, it is impossible to set questions of this kind without some ambiguities, but those in this book are both unusually free of ambiguities and do not fall into the trap of attempting to test complex knowledge that is best tested by different types of examination.

The questions are all of the true/false type and therefore have the merit of simplicity. The brief preface describing how questions of this kind are marked and evaluated is clear, and will be useful to staff and candidates alike.

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Introduction to the Blood–Brain Barrier, H. Davson, B. Zlokovic, L. Rakit and M.B. Segal. Pp. 335, illustrated. Macmillan Press, Basingstoke, Hampshire, 1993. Hardback, £55.00.

This book is a detailed introduction to all aspects of the blood–brain barrier. Hugh Davson, the senior author, is

a world authority in this field and his extensive publications span many decades. As might be expected from this combination of authors, this book provides an authoritative account of the subject. Over a third of the book is devoted to historical and basic concepts of the blood-brain barrier including transport kinetics and carrier-mediated processes. This section (as is the rest of the book) is extensively illustrated with diagrams, mathematical detail and graphs and is organized in a logical sequence. Subsequent chapters are devoted to transport of glucose, amino acids, peptides and proteins as well as nucleotides and vitamins across the blood-brain barrier. Finally, a short account is given of experimental models in the study of pathology of the blood-brain barrier which may prove to be relevant to human disease.

This book is certainly essential reading for anyone interested in the blood-brain barrier. It is comprehensive, well organized, well illustrated and thoroughly referenced. This is not a book for beginners and I think that some of the technical aspects, especially the mathematical details, may be hard going for those unfamiliar with the subject. Nevertheless, the book certainly contains a wealth of interesting and up-to-date information. The authors state in the introduction that, if the book succeeds in stimulating research on the pathology of some central nervous system diseases, then it would have achieved its main purpose. I have little doubt that this aim will be realized. This book will certainly be an extremely useful addition to neurological and neuroscience libraries.

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Hand Rehabilitation – A Practical Guide, edited by G.L. Clark, E.F. Shaw Wilgis, B. Aiello, D. Eckhaus and L. Valdata Eddington. Pp. xvii + 341, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, London, New York, Tokyo, 1993. Paperback, £44.00.

This exhaustive book on hand rehabilitation has a multidisciplinary authorship and comes from the Union Memorial Hospital, Baltimore, Maryland. It covers every aspect of hand rehabilitation, from burns, through nerve repair and desensitization, to tendon repair, skin grafts, amputation, arthroplasty, arthritis and fractures. It is intended as a practical guide so that each chapter is set out in note format under the same headings of: definition, surgical purpose, treatment goal, indications for therapy, therapy techniques, complications and evaluation timeline.

It is undoubtedly a book written by great experts for great experts, which must inevitably limit its use. Exhaustive coverage under each heading becomes repetitive as each author wades through, for example, each stage of pretreatment evaluation for every last complication. Long lists of therapy techniques, with little or no explanation, leave the interested but less well-informed reader bemused. The complete absence of critical discussion or guidance as to which of the many techniques are

felt to be most effective will disappoint the better informed reader hoping to gain insight into the experience of this internationally recognized hand centre.

The book does, though, provide some useful and clear illustrations. The checklists may provide a helpful starting point for more junior therapists approaching a problem for the first time, or for those revising for exams, and, in this respect, the list format may be more accessible than some of the large prose-style books on hand rehabilitation that have preceded it.

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Human Embryology, W.J. Larsen. Pp. 479, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, London, Edinburgh, New York, Tokyo, 1993. Paperback, £24.95.

Imagine finding a section on contraceptive techniques at the end of the first chapter of an embryology textbook. As this is a text designed to support a series of lectures to students as part of the gross anatomy course, perhaps the author wishes to help in their sex education. In fact the book is quite refreshing in its approach, having a 'clinical applications' and an 'experimental principles' section at the end of each formal chapter. In his preface he also talks of the burgeoning field of genetic counselling, and he is obviously fascinated by the field of clinical genetics and its overlap with his subject. Lecturing to people with young minds, he is probably very popular by adding juicy clinical titbits to what many might find a rather dry subject, even though we marvel at the timing and precision of organ formation and development.

The didactic sections are well illustrated and have useful highlight headings amongst the text. Sometimes the author overreaches himself in the clinical applications section, but it might take a clinician to realize this. His motive no doubt is to open the eyes of his students. Relatively new concepts such as imprinting and homeoboxes are dealt with quite well. Reference to Prader Willi and Angelman syndromes gives the wrong chromosome as involved in the imprinting process. Without a good deal of existing knowledge, many such references might be dense to the reader who would need to consult the useful reading lists for a more complete understanding.

I shall find the book quite useful. I looked up a few topics from the index such as homeoboxes, diaphragmatic hernia, omphalocele and found myself well satisfied with their handling in the text. The book is moderately priced and useful for personal library shelves as a general, up-to-date embryology and more, textbook.

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