Books received


Book reviews

Breast Cancer


Cancer of the breast is the commonest cause of death from malignant disease among women in the Western civilized world. In England and Wales alone, some 11 000 women die each year from this condition. In addition, the treatment of breast cancer, which so often involves considerable mutilation of the patient, is the subject of considerable controversy and debate. There are therefore excellent reasons why this form of malignancy should be of such intense interest to both the lay public and to the medical profession.

As a result of an immense amount of recent clinical and laboratory research, much information is coming forward on all aspects of this disease. There have been fascinating discoveries in the field of hormonal receptors, the detection of blood markers, and sophisticated screening using nuclear magnetic resonance. A number of controversial topics such as the role of the contraceptive pill in the possible aetiology of breast cancer, the value of adjuvant chemotherapy, the value of screening and the primary treatment of the tumour itself are all the subject of intense study. These are among the topics dealt with in this short paperback, which is written by a Research Fellow in the Department of Surgery of the Edinburgh University Medical School.

Unfortunately, the author makes the fundamental mistake of aiming his book at two distinct populations. The cover states that 'as well as serving as an introduction to this important area of investigation for general practitioners, medical students, nurses, laboratory workers and others who come into professional contact with breast cancer, it will be invaluable also for the general reader. This leads to a constant conflict between explaining, for example, that all tissues are made up of cells to describing the most sophisticated aspects of modern biochemistry. It is a pity that the book was not aimed at one or other of these two dissimilar populations.

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Colonoscopy. Techniques, Clinical Practice and Colour Atlas


This is a most informative and well set out work, and written by a number of authors all of whom are experts in their field.

It is much more than a book on colonoscopy, and covers all sorts of interesting aspects including an excellent section on colon cancer, and on radiology of the large bowel. Of interest also is a chapter on paediatric colonoscopy which is an increasingly performed practice.

At the end of the book there are 187 colonoscopy illustrations. They are all of exceptionally high quality, and cover the full range of colonic pathology. This book would be particularly useful for doctors considering starting a colonoscopy service, as there are several chapters on administration and running of a practical colonoscopy unit.
This is a long and excellent book and well worth the price.

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Dictionary of Medical Ethics

The status of the medical profession rests not only on the service provided, it reflects society's trust in the standards of practice observed. At all levels this implies that moral obligations govern the conduct of doctors, and indeed the possession of a corporate ethics could be regarded as one of the essential marks of a profession. The publication within 4 years of a second revised and enlarged edition of this Dictionary confirms the current interest in this controversial field. There is now an introduction containing erudite essays on the evolution of Medical Science and of Medical Ethics. They are written by the editors and link the concepts underlying the book to the succeeding reference format. Subjects are taken from A to W with 148 authors contributing. In some entries, such as 'Abortion', an additional editorial comment is provided. The book is intended for the layman as well as the doctor, thus many subjects such as 'General Practice' or 'Intensive Care Units' give basic facts on the speciality, followed by a discussion of the related moral issues. The principal ethical theories and traditions are explained and the main International Declarations on medical practice, experimentation, and the determination of death are recorded in detail. There is extensive cross-referencing, and useful bibliographies are provided on many topics. As a mine of immediate information and a detailed reference guide to further study this work is unrivalled. Since medical ethics reflect important issues which involve society as a whole, authoritative, dispassionate and clear information must be made widely available. This book will undoubtedly go far to promote this end and will usefully stimulate and inform discussion.

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Emergency Psychiatry for the House Officer

Whether he sees himself as having psychiatric skills or not, the House Officer in the A & E Department is going to be faced with the management of psychiatric emergencies. Violence, drug abuse, alcoholism, psychoses, suicide attempts, confusional states and plain human distress and fear will confront him frequently. He (or she, of course) may feel inadequate, frightened, impatient or irritated by such patients, but ignoring the problem won't make it go away.

This practical manual by two American psychiatrists written expressly for the non-psychiatric house officer should go some way towards increasing confidence in dealing with psychiatric emergencies. They give many excellent practical hints from how to approach the distressed patient ('How can we help you Mr Smith' rather than the patronising 'What's the matter Joe') to techniques for coping with those brandishing fire arms. Fortunately, the latter seem to be commoner in the U.S.A. where 'security guards' (sic) are more ready available than in the average British A & E Department.

The psychiatric presentation of organic disorders is well covered, even though perhaps inappropriately elaborate investigations for the emergency department (such as EEG and Bf levels) are listed—but this is no doubt for the sake of completeness. There are useful tips on eliciting and interpreting a psychiatric history.

This relatively short but expensive paperback volume may be marred for some by the rather too comprehensive lists of symptoms, differential diagnoses and investigations, but overall it should prove a useful book for the duty room of a casualty department.

As the book is American, the U.S.A. trade names for drugs are bracketed with the official names which may cause some confusion. There is an appendix of some 58 pages (out of a total 166) listing virtually every drug in the pharmacopoeia and the names of commercial preparations. This long list purports to show which drugs have possible psychiatric side effects, though as many have none, or are non-specific, it seems impractical to include this book by a third party. Again, because of its American origin, no mention is made of the working of the Mental Health Act which would be useful for inclusion in such a manual for use in this country.

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Microbiology for Clinicians

This little book dedicated to Joan Stokes maintains the purposeful clinical tradition which she herself originated in her work and writings.

It is not, nor does it affect to be, a text book. Early chapters discuss the pathogenicity and the differences between colonization and infection. There follows a chapter on the bacteriology laboratory including succinct descriptions of the various bacteria, their classification and the mechanisms by which they cause disease in man. Viruses, fungi and parasites have a single chapter in which the clinical significance of isolation and serological investigations are discussed. Probably the best chapter is on the anti-bacterial drugs in which Grünberg's particular interest is reflected. His opinions on antibiotic combinations, the use of bactericidal drugs and the discussion on prophylactic chemotherapy are well informed and balanced in their treatment.

Infections in general practice are discussed in a separate chapter with advice on how best the microbiology laboratory might be used in these cases and there are separate chapters on infections commonly met with in hospitals, the use of the laboratory in outbreaks of infection, and the control of infection in the community; the last includes a discussion on public health, the containment of infection, immunization, and health education.

The microbiological missionary zeal of Grünberg becomes readily apparent in the didactic and perhaps even inflexible chapters on the control of infection in hospitals and the control of antibiotic resistance; these rewarding chapters lay down very practical guidelines and describe clearly effective measures for the control of both. These areas of unavoidable clinical involvement of microbiologists who will be very familiar with the problems described and will benefit from some of the solutions advised.

There is a final chapter which has an exciting and optimistic look into the future; that a note of pessimism creeps into this chapter is really due to Dr Grünberg's unhappiness with the current control of antibiotic use and his fears that ill-judged and profligate use of valuable antibacterials will lead to less and less successful therapy in the future.