Books received


Book reviews

Clinical Urology Illustrated


In the preface to this handsome book, the first clinical urological text to be written by an Australian, the author suggests that urology is not given an adequate place in the curriculum of many Medical Schools. Thus this book is written for the medical student and urologist in training, presumably with the aim of presenting an uncluttered, but comprehensive view of clinical urological problems, enhanced by clear illustrations.

Trained urologists must be impressed by the thoroughness with which the author has covered his field, although the information is presented in such a condensed form that a tyro may at times find the text indigestible. Throughout the book, discussion is sacrificed for brevity, resulting in an impression of dogmatism. This is a pity if the book is primarily designed for students, in whom one presumably wishes to stimulate a questioning approach to clinical problems. Certainly a British urologist may not agree with all the views expressed, many of which have a decidedly transatlantic flavour. Some subjects, such as transplantation and urethrotomy gain only a passing mention, and the lithotrite, so beloved of generations of urologists, does not appear. Nevertheless, the text is peppered with snippets of good, practical advice which more than make up for the deficiencies mentioned. One of the strengths of the book lies in the beautiful line drawings and the clarity of the layout. The plates of the X-rays are less satisfactory and some time it is difficult to see what they are meant to show. There are good reproductions of CAT scans and ultrasound studies, although students not versed in the interpretation of the images produced by these techniques may find the legends to the plates inadequate. The references are well chosen, there are useful suggestions on further reading and there is an excellent index.

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Alcohol Problems. ABC of Alcohol. Alcohol and Alcoholism


This excellent book divided into two very different parts. The first is a sort of comic book, easy to read but packed with useful facts, well-illustrated, and exactly right for discussion groups. Parts of it would be useful as resource material which would be particularly appropriate for mixed groups of vocational trainees during both the hospital and general practice phase of their training. An enormous amount of time and money is wasted by inappropriate referral, investigation, and treatment of patients whose central problem is alcohol dependence. Discussion of this material would help to improve matters in this respect, and experienced consultants and GPs with an interest in the subject could introduce the necessary compassion and get rid of some of the punitive attitudes so commonly found.

The second section of articles by Richard Smith are a bonus. They are all well worth reading and excellently referenced. Far more research is needed in this subject, above all in general practice where the cases really are. The references in these articles are a reliable guide to what has already been done. Every postgraduate centre should have several copies.

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100 case histories for the MRCP


Published material designed to assist candidates sitting postgraduate diploma examinations abroad, although not all of it is of high quality. Nevertheless, the demand for such material is great and authors therefore have an obligation to produce carefully written, well-presented and, above all, genuinely helpful texts that will truly test candidates' skills and knowledge. This book passes on all counts. The first edition was published in 1976 and proved very popular. This edition has been carefully revised and thoroughly updated; many new case histories have been added. All are convincing, are said to be authentic (although one wonders how the Eskimo who suffered on unfortunate experience following a visit to a Winnipeg brothel came to the attention of the authors), are well written and are suitably 'grey'. Some histories contain a good deal of background 'noise', but medicine is like this—and so is the 'written' portion of the Part II MRCP (UK) examination. Many histories contain data for interpretation. Inevitably clues are sometimes given in the histories. A woman of 68 who is described as a 'well-known public figure' is an immediate suspect for syphilis (or alcoholism); fortunately, she left hospital with her character and her reputation unblemished. Some cases are briefer and simpler than others but all combine originality and clinical common sense. A number of the histories are gems. The authors clearly have a sense of humour (and sometimes of mischief), as well as a flair for producing good material. In general, the distracting statements and red herrings are good and the histories are suitably concise. One must read through each case carefully and note every statement and observation in order to avoid falling into the traps that nearly all contain—these are skilfully prepared, well disguised and sometimes quite ingenious. On reading the authors'
comments on the cases, the candidate will sometimes (as I did) feel embarrassed that a vital clue has been overlooked; he can very seldom feel annoyed with the authors for withholding essential information. These case discussions are almost invariably good, although sometimes a little carelessness is observed such as the frequent use of the phrase ‘blood sugar’ and the consistent incorrect spelling of the word ‘pruritus’. The authors conclude their comments on each case either with a statement about what happened to the patient or with a brief discussion of the diagnosis and treatment of the condition described; the latter are sometimes a little weak.

This book is compulsive reading and will be found invaluable by all candidates for Part II MRCR(UK). Indeed, it can be very usefully used by more senior physicians as a means of self-assessment and continuing education, and by students as a diverting and stimulating supplement to more conventional texts. It is in no sense an exam crib and is more challenging and exciting than the familiar and rather turgid ‘Aids to …’ type of book. Careful perusal of this text will be rewarding to both undergraduate and postgraduate students, and will help them to appreciate the importance of, and learn to treat, renal failure in young patients. The authors are to be congratulated on producing a book which offers excellent value for the price.

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Advances in Neurology Vol. 29. Neurofibromatosis (von Recklinghausen Disease). Genetics, Cell Biology and Biochemistry

There are available a number of books on relatively rare genetic disorders. Tuberculosis sclerosis, Huntington’s disease and myotonic dystrophy have all been the subject of monographs. Neurofibromatosis has not been neglected. This is the commonest dominantly inherited disease, with a birth frequency of 1 in 3,000 and a load of about 200 cases a year.

There have been 4 books written in English on the subject although the last, the excellent monograph by Crowe et al., was published in 1959. Clearly, this subject needs to be updated. Recent interest in the ‘elephant man’ has led to adverse publicity about the severity of neurofibromatosis. To redress the balance and to inform doctors about the frequency of the disease, a lay society—the National Neurofibromatosis Foundation—was formed in the USA and the conference which culminated in this monograph was, in part, sponsored by the group. (A similar society, ‘Link’, now exists in the United Kingdom.)

The book is divided into 5 sections. The first deals with the clinical and pathological aspects of this disease, and includes an assessment of the frequency and extent of malignancy, and of the relationship between central and peripheral neurofibromatosis. Then follow sections covering current research on both nerve growth factor and on the biology of the neural crest cells. Neurofibromatosis (a neurocristopathy) is thought to be the result of a defect in the differentiation or migration of the neural crest cells because of an intrinsic genetic defect or a defect in the immediate environment. Nerve growth factor might be involved in the persistence of the normally transient neural crest. Whatever the final solution might be, these chapters constitute the most comprehensive and stimulating available account to date.

The clinical diagnosis is still a problem. Riccardi states ‘I do not consider café-au-lait spots alone as sufficient for the certain diagnosis’—although three neurofibromas might be sufficient.

The volume ends with a profile of Von Recklinghausen and his pupils and includes a translation of the original case report. If this volume is placed alongside Crowe, Schull and Neel’s 1956 mono-

A Colour Atlas of Surgical Pathology

The colour illustrations of macroscopic and microscopic aspects of surgical pathological specimens in this book are of excellent quality showing artistic as well as scientific merit.

In general, the range is comprehensive and many conditions encountered in a surgical pathology practice in this country are referred to. The authors have admirably met, that is, of providing the practising histopathologist and surgeon with a ready reference to illustrations of a wide range of common or well-known disorders. The reviewer must admit some reservation however, about the authors’ assessment that this work is ‘sufficient to satisfy the needs of undergraduate and postgraduate students preparing for examinations in pathology’, and it seems just as useful to look at the book in the light of this claim and in particular in relation to the training of pathologists.

Illustrations are of course helpful as an introduction to a condition and sometimes even for purposes of revision, but there is a serious danger that the student will consider pathological diagnosis as an exercise of matching features observed in the theatre, the cryostat room or paraffin laboratory with pictures in a book and it is surely agreed by most teachers that resemblance is rarely not a basis for identification. If the authors of this book had taken advantage of the remarkable opportunities presented by their very fine illustrations and indicated in the text the criteria on which assessments are based, referring at the same time to differential diagnostic issues, the postgraduate might have derived a greater benefit from these individual pictures.

As the reviewer has already alluded to, whereas it may be asking too much for an occasional reference to processes (the business of General Pathology perhaps), it seems reasonable to request some indication of the incidence of various changes in the condition outlined. The student ought to have an idea of, say, the incidence of splenic involvement in Hodgkin’s disease. In some instances, a helpful commentary accompanies the pictures, but the captions are sometimes inadequate to the degree of being misleading. For example, the criteria on which gluten-sensitive enteropathy rests includes reduction in the epithelial cell height which is not mentioned, oesin-positive ground-glass cells are insufficient for a diagnosis of viral hepatitis and accounts of hepatoblastomas ought to have a remark about connective tissue lesions. Fibrous replacement of muscularis in chronic peptic ulcer should surely be underlined and the term myoxosarcma would cause no reaction in some quarters. The choice of specimens must reflect an occupational view and different treatments. These are intended to be constructive and the tone of the review to be complimentary.

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