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Books received

Palliative Care: the Management of Far-Advanced Illness. Edited by DEREK DOYLE. Pp. vii + 536, illustrated. Croom Helm, London, Canberra, The Charles Press, Philadelphia, 1984. £25.00.

Saunders Dictionary and Encyclopedia of Laboratory Medicine and Technology. Edited by JAMES L. BENNINGTON. Pp. xix + 1674, illustrated. W. B. Saunders, Philadelphia, London, Toronto, Mexico City, Rio de Janeiro, Sydney, Tokyo, 1984. £40.00.

Book reviews

Annual Review of Immunology Vol. 1

Edited by W. E. PAUL, C. G. FATHMAN and H. METZGER. Pp. 666, illustrated. Annual Reviews Inc., Palo Alto, California, 1983. $30.00.

In an increasingly complicated and diverse science such as immunology, there is a great need for good 'state of the art' reviews. This new entry to the Annual Review series is one which will be welcomed by immunologists in all areas of the discipline, for it is to the research immunologist that this book is directed. It is of little value to the clinician, unless he/she has a highly sophisticated knowledge of the subject and even then as much of the material is mouse orientated, those concerned with human immunology must hope for enlightenment in future editions.

The book begins with an excellent chapter by Elvin Kabat, describing how he began research 50 years ago and outlines his career for the first 21 years. The financial strictures of today are considerably easier to cope with than the political ones he endured during the McCarthy era. Among other chapters in the book are highly detailed reviews in which immunological tolerance at the clonal level, major histocompatibility restriction of T and B cell responses to viral antigens and mechanisms of T and B cell interactions are well discussed.

There are two chapters devoted to the genetics of the mouse major histocompatibility complex, which, although overlapping in the general area, are very different in detail. Similarly there are chapters on the structural basis of antibody function and on immunoglobulin genes and, to bewilder even the immunologist, a complicated chapter on the genetics, expression and function of idiotypes.

The biochemistry of T and B cell growth and differentiating factors is well advanced, even to the extent of the IL2 gene being cloned. Hence the chapters on antigen specific T cell factors and B cell growth factors are comprehensive and informative.

There are further chapters on T cell clones, immunoregulatory T cell pathways, on transplantation in experimental animals and on mediators of inflammation. All the chapters in this book assume a very high level of basic knowledge and it is only the professional research immunologist who is going to understand them and derive any benefit from these very well written, but highly complicated reviews. For the doctor wanting a more general immunological teaching, the book is not to be recommended.

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Disorders of Thrombin Formation

Edited by ROBERT W. COLMAN. *Methods in Hematology Series,* Vol. 7. Pp. xi + 161, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, New York, Edinburgh, London, Melbourne, 1983. £25.00.

This edited manual provides current methodology for measurement of zymogens, the products of their enzyme cleavage and the measurement of enzyme-inhibitor complexes.

Because another volume in the same series has already been published on factors VIII and IX (haemophilia A and B) these topics are not included.

The book's focus is on the use of immunochemical techniques. Time-honoured coagulation assays involving the thrombin-fibrinogen reaction receive one chapter's attention dealing with the standardization of thromboplastin for the one stage prothrombin time and lipid for the partial thromboplastic time.

The book begins with a chapter on the use of chromogenic substrates for the assay of prothrombin, factor X, prekallikrein, factor XII and plasminogen. Thereafter there is a chapter devoted to the initial stages of the coagulation cascade. Radiochemical assays that measure the cleavage of tritiated peptides are described in the kinetic analysis of factor X. A description is provided of the very sophisticated techniques for distinguishing between the normal and abnormal prothrombin molecules in patients on warfarin. There is an interesting account of the lupus anticoagulant and how its properties can be studied. A chapter is devoted to heparin assays.

The last chapter describes how to measure fragments split from prothrombin in the generation of thrombin and also techniques for the assay of 'thrombin-antithrombin' complexes in the blood.

This book is very specialized but with the widespread interest in haemostasis and thrombosis in Western societies it deserves to be purchased extensively by coagulation laboratories. It deserves to be a success and the editor Robert W. Colman should be congratulated in his selection of contributors and in the discipline imposed by him to turn in manuscripts which represent the present state of the art at the date of publication.

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Essentials of Human Embryology

By S. M. BHATNAGAR, M. L. KOTHARI and KOPA A. MEHTA. 2nd edn. Pp. 244, illustrated. Orient Longman, Hyderabad, (Distributed by Sangam Books, London), 1983. £4.95.

An interesting book well illustrated with many line drawings, most of which are original. The diagrams are informative and are good enough to have survived rather mediocre printing and poor paper.

The book contains a useful standard text marred by a rather bizarre and naive first chapter, where the authors attempt to explain their philosophy. One can have sympathy with their views but not their inaccurate attempt to justify them.

The flow of their explanations of embryological development is marred by frequent attempts at humour, a difficult thing to achieve at the best of times, and made even more difficult in an embryology context.

If the book is to be aimed at a British market the rather verbose text must be ruthlessly pruned and the amount of detail curtailed.

If all the information in this book is essential, then one is left to wonder what the non-essential material contains. We must convey the message to authors of textbooks for medical students that the student has a vast load of information competing for his time, and what he really needs from most authors is a summary of the essentials of their subject that have a relevance to clinical learning and practice. The detailed text book has to take second place and