Book Reviews

Aids to Undergraduate Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Christopher Sinclair and J. Beverley Webb. Pp. iii + 191, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, London, Melbourne, New York, 1986. £4.95.

The authors of this newly-published text for undergraduates state in their preface that they 'believe that examination technique is as important as adequate factual knowledge'. This implies that the book provides a way for qualifying to be a doctor, requiring little attention to basic facts. That surely is not a philosophy to be encouraged. The idea of producing a small hand-book to remind the medical student or the newly-qualified resident of differential diagnoses, aetiological factors, investigation results and treatments is reasonable but the authors have not shown in their lists any logic to the order within each list presenting the information to be learnt parrot-fashion. Some of the diagrams I found confusing, notably those involving the menstrual cycle physiology where the days of the cycle are numbered somewhat illogically and many of the flow charts I did not find easy to follow, with the occasional obvious omission. The diagrams are generally very basic and in some instances, unclear or containing mistakes. There are unfortunately a number of spelling and other mistakes throughout the volume and some, such as that on page 88 relating to sperm density, should never have passed beyond the proof-reading stage. The style, in places, is rather slovenly, referring to tumours '... in the wildest possible sense ...' and when referring to breastfeeding statements like '... contains the right things in the right amounts ...'; this is hardly the standard that medical students should expect.

For a new book to be introduced onto the market, a market already thriving with undergraduate textbooks, a significant improvement upon those presently available is required. This small textbook does not meet that requirement, I believe, and I do not think would be much of an aid to undergraduates sitting their examinations in obstetrics and gynaecology.

I.Z. MacKenzie
Nuffield Department of Obstetrics
and Gynaecology,
John Radcliffe Hospital,
Oxford

Annual Review of Genetics, Vol. 19, 1985, edited by Allan Campbell, Ira Herskowitz and Laurence M. Sandler. Pp. xii + 590, illustrated. Annual Reviews, Palo Alto, California, 1985. \$27.00 (USA), \$30.00 (elsewhere). Prices include postage and handling.

A brief look at the contents page of the most recent *Annual Review of Genetics* reveals a selection of authoritative articles whose titles, by and large, do not immediately compel the interest of the student of medicine. Of the 19 articles in this 575 page volume only two (on HPRT and insulin genes)

have a distinctly medical flavour while three dwell on aspects of microbial genetics (mutation suppression in *E. coli*, regulation of transcription initiation in bacteria and recent progress in reovirus research), three on plant genetics (structure and function of yeast centromeres, Maize Adhl, comparative organization of chloroplast genomes), one of the genetics of *Drosophila* embryogenesis and three on other mammalian systems (mouse genetics, mouse t haplotypes and mammalian cell-cycle mutants). The remainder encompass broader perspectives including population genetics, DNA repair systems, chromatin structure, specific techniques (*in vitro* mutagenesis and hybrid genes) and aspects of gene organization (processed pseudogenes) and of gene regulation (by steroid receptors).

Of the two articles devoted to cloned human genes, that by D.F. Steiner and colleagues on insulin genes is however largely confined to structural and evolutionary aspects and emphasizes that insulin is one member of a superfamily of several insulin-like growth factors. In contrast, the article by J.T. Stout and C.T. Caskey on the hypoxanthine phosphoribosyl transferase (HPRT) gene focuses on the molecular pathogenesis of HPRT deficiency associated with Lesch-Nyhan syndrome and gout, and considers the future prospect of gene therapy.

T. Strachan
Department of Medical Genetics,
St. Mary's Hospital,
Manchester M13 0JH

Antibiotic Therapy in Clinical Practice, C. Simon, W. Stille and P.J. Wilkinson. Pp. xiii + 559, illustrated. F.K. Schattauer, Stuttgart, New York, 1985. DM 78.00.

This book is a first English edition of a successful German textbook now in its fifth edition. The third author, Dr P.J. Wilkinson, joined a successful team to facilitate the transformation. The book is divided usefully into five sections, basic concepts, properties of the drugs, general rules of therapy, treatment of infections and special therapeutic problems. Unfortunately, translation is not the only barrier to crossing the Channel; readers more familiar with English language publications will realise that a different bibliography has been used as source material. Some topics have a bibliography only in German. The text is not referenced and this is particularly irksome when the authors dogmatically state as fact an area of controversy or dispute.

In its favour is the compactness of the tome, and the breadth and ease of referencing information. The readers must, however, remember that not all the treatment regimes cited in this text as being first line choice have gained full acceptance in the UK. In particular, the fondness of the authors for beta-lactam/beta-lactam rather than aminoglycoside/beta-lactam combinations in the seriously ill is still controversial.

Although this book has not achieved universality and

would benefit from additional editing, it is a handy and quick reference giving the authors' preferences on suitable therapeutic regimes.

M.C. Kelsey
Department of Microbiology,
St. Mary's Wing,
Whittington Hospital,
London N19 5NF

Flagyl: the Story of a Pharmaceutical Discovery, J.A. McFadzean, Pp. 117, illustrated. Parthenon Publishing, Carnforth, 1986. £9.95.

Professor McFadzean, who has been intimately involved in the story of the development and evaluation of metronidazole tells the story very entertainingly. The tale is told for Everyman in plain English and with amusing anecdotes.

Metronidazole was developed, licensed and marketed as treatment for trichomoniasis. It was subsequently recognized to be active against other parasites, notably *Entamoeba histolytica* and *Giardia lamblia*. More interestingly, shrewd observation by a dental surgeon, Mr David Shinn, established the clinical effectiveness of metronidazole in at least one anaerobic bacterial infection, acute ulcerative gingivitis. This led to laboratory studies showing *in vitro* activity of the drug against virtually all anaerobes. At the time only a few enthusiasts considered anaerobic bacteria to be of great clinical moment. Improved techniques of laboratory recognition of anaerobes by culture or gas-liquid chromatography led to the realization that these organisms are the dominant flora of the intestinal and vaginal flora, and cause much of the harm when surgery in these fields is complicated by infection. Numerous clinical studies showed that metronidazole has a major part to play in the prevention and treatment of anaerobic sepsis.

The chain of fortuitous observations leading to clinical advance is reminiscent of the penicillin story. So is the single minded enthusiasm of several individuals inside the pharmaceutical company and outside who persisted in following up clinical and laboratory leads despite discouragement (at least) from on high. Anyone who has any interest in clinical research or drug development should read Prof. McFadzean's little book, a pleasure encompassed by this reviewer in a single evening. It has the character of a modern technological fairy tale.

R.N. Grüneberg
Department of Microbiology,
University College Hospital,
London WC1E 6AU.

Lecture Notes on Rheumatology, John Edmonds and Graham Hughes. Pp. vii + 307, illustrated. Blackwell Scientific Publications, Oxford, London, Edinburgh, Boston, Palo Alto, Melbourne, 1985. £8.50.

This volume is a belated but welcome addition to the 'Lecture Notes' series and outlines the wide range of disorders found under the heading of 'rheumatology'. The clear, brief account of the HLA system and the major histocompatibility complex could be recommended to many postgraduates. The chapter on laboratory tests includes a table of disease associations with the more recently described antinuclear and anticytoplasmic antibodies which will be valued by many practising rheumatologists. However, the book is obviously aimed primarily at the clinical undergraduate. There is heavy competition between rheumatological 'primers' in this market. The brief telegraphic style will be popular with some and anathema to others. This text contains far more information than most undergraduates will require and the number and standard of diagrams and illustrations are a strong feature. I was fascinated to see that a majority of radiological illustrations came from the King Faisal Hospital, Saudi Arabia, thus subliminally excising the prejudice from students' minds that rheumatic diseases are peculiarly diseases of colder, damper climates! I enjoyed the X-ray and bone scan of spinal brucellosis. There are several points of detail to dispute. For example, I was surprised to read how often phenylbutazone is advocated whereas it should surely be reserved to rheumatologists for treating resistant spondylitis. Several anti-inflammatory drugs, for example, alclofenac and fenclozic acid, are listed yet never survived the Great Purge. They have no part in an undergraduate text. I find the best way to evaluate a brief rheumatology text is to see how it tackles a difficult subject like vasculitis. This book copes well and I have no doubt that many will turn to it as a relatively painless way to acquire the 'bones' of the subject. Inevitably, though, it communicates very little of the excitement of modern rheumatology.

A.J. Crisp
Department of Rheumatology,
Addenbrooke's Hospital,
Cambridge CB2 2QQ

Medical Gynaecology, edited by M.C. Macnaughton. Pp. x + 272, illustrated. Blackwell Scientific Publications, Oxford, London, Edinburgh, Boston, Palo Alto, Melbourne, 1985. £19.50.

Standard textbooks of gynaecology have a distinctly surgical bias, with chapters arranged on an anatomical or pathological basis. The relative decline in the number of gynaecological specialists taking surgical fellowship and an increase in the number taking M.R.C.P. as a second qualification is a reflection of the growing recognition of the medical aspects of the specialty. Callam Macnaughton is therefore to be congratulated on his timely production of a book devoted entirely to the medical aspects of gynaecology.

The book is well produced and illustrated and not excessively expensive by today's standards. It consists of twelve chapters written by Glasgow specialists on topics which include amongst them family planning, termination counselling, well woman screening, genetic counselling and sex education. I do not recall seeing a chapter on sex education in any gynaecological textbook before, and this is a welcome innovation, although at times it is rather politically