Book Reviews


This book was a great disappointment. Attractively presented, with an interesting and exciting topic, it left this reviewer irritated and frustrated.

In the preface it was stated that the book represented a compilation of papers given at a Symposium at Copanello, Italy, updated for publication. This should have been a warning. Such symposia have a bad track record, since the style, content and immediacy of papers given at symposia seldom transfer to a published book, which often appears long afterwards. The date of this Symposium is not given, but it seems unlikely to have been less than 3 years ago, since few of the references in the 47 chapters are later than 1985.

Indeed, given the title of Advances in Immunomodulation, many chapters cover work 10 years old or more. In a chapter by Bizzini and Maestraeni on Corynebacteria there are over 130 references of which only 25 are from this decade. Other chapters are so short that they are barely more than abstracts of even a 20 minute talk. Many are devoid of figures and tables, and give the impression of being reluctantly submitted.

The first section deals with agents derived from bacteria, the second with interleukins, prostaglandins and other compounds derived from the immune system, and the third deals with drugs and monoclonal antibodies.

There are few reports of clinical studies with sound data on clinical efficacy. Most of the chapters deal with immune responses in experimental animals or changes in in vitro parameters after in vivo or in vitro exhibition of various agents.

Even in the section dealing with clinical evaluation, it is difficult to find details of patients' responses. A chapter by Reynier et al. on studies with P40 (derived from Corynebacteria) in breast cancer patients suggests that this agent is successful in improving the prognosis of patients with a low initial score in the assessment of their immune competence. However, it is difficult to evaluate the evidence in this chapter and follow the rationale of treatment regimens.

There are chapters on the use of bacteria-derived agents (e.g. LPS) to treat infections and allergies, but the evidence is generally not well presented and largely unconvincing.

The final section on the use of adjuvants to enhance antibody responses, brings the subject back to reality, although without presenting any really exciting new agents or approaches.

In short this volume contained too much of theoretical concepts and strategies for treatment, with too little really new experimental models, and hardly any soundly based or clearly presented clinical studies. The editors and contributors have obviously had difficulties working in a language which is not their own. This book at £40.00 is not recommended reading for anyone, other than organisers of other symposia, as providing lessons on what to avoid.

R.A. Thompson
Regional Department of Immunology,
East Birmingham Hospital,
Bordesley Green East,
Birmingham B9 5ST.


The publishers aim to produce a series of books which 'describe the development, methods and interpretation of clinical tests in various specialties, together with an evaluation of their accuracy, safety and clinical usefulness'. It is suggested that the book should be smaller and more readable than the standard text. Dr Rees has, on the whole, succeeded admirably in this task by producing a readable book of manageable size. Even when read from cover to cover the text flows smoothly, although one is aware of some repetition which, rightly or wrongly reduces the need for cross reference in a book which will be primarily used to look up specific points. In his own introduction, Dr Rees points out that investigations on patients with chest disease do tend to be separated into works on radiology, respiratory function and bronchoscopy amongst others. He wishes to bring together information about all of these in a single text. On the whole he has been successful, but he is clearly more at home with some subjects than others and so does not fully maintain the high standard of most chapters throughout the book.

The first chapter on respiratory function tests is particularly good, although some discussion on the assessment of differences in terms of percentage or standard residuals would have been helpful. It is difficult to avoid over-simplification in summary tables without making them too complex. The tables have indeed been kept very simple, so in a number of places in this chapter and elsewhere in the book they are misleading, particularly in situations where a number of factors may act in opposite directions. For example, on page 30, sarcoidosis is said to produce a low KCO; in practice KCO is frequently high early in the disease when alveolar volumes are reduced more than alveolar function and overall blood flow is maintained.

The sections on bacteriology and immunology are good and make for easy reference. Perhaps insufficient emphasis has been put on the pneumococcus, which is the most frequent cause of pneumonia, whether community or hospital acquired. No mention is made of rusty sputum which is still a useful marker of this condition, nor of the frequent paucity or absence of sputum early in classical pneumonia. Direct microscopy can be useful even on 'poor' specimens of sputum early in the condition.

Bronchoscopy is discussed in detail, although the use of general anaesthesia using an endotracheal tube is not specifically mentioned as a planned procedure for the particularly nervous patient or subject who easily develops laryngeal spasm. The suggested time for disinfection, an overkill of about 10 times but which is suggested as a reasonable compromise, is both impracticable and prohibitively expensive for district general hospitals who depend on a 20 minute turn round time for bronchoscopy. Can one justify the financial and radiation cost of X-raying every asymptomatic patient after a transbronchial biopsy unless one is conducting a study into the complications of the procedure?

The weakest section is the short chapter on electrocardiography, which gives little information that would not already be known to the potential reader of this
book. The chapter on radiology is disappointing. It is difficult to see how Dr Rees could have covered the subject in the same degree of detail that he has the pulmonary physiology section within the bounds of this book. Nevertheless, a few more paragraphs on basic principles and interpretation of overlying shadows would have been helpful.

In summary, this is an excellent book for reference, and of value to medical people from the student through to the consultant in respiratory medicine; but it was very ambitious, and perhaps a mistake, to attempt to include radiology within its compass.

C.K. Connolly
The Friarage Hospital,
Northallerton,
N. Yorks DL6 1JG.


It is an impossible task for any one reviewer to assess how complete and up to date are the many contributions in the major textbooks of medicine. This is particularly so with this example of the species which includes among its 25 major sections ones on gynaecology, otorhinolaryngology and psychiatry. Who would expect a whole page on masturbation? However, the high standards of those chapters covering topics with which I am familiar (which do not include masturbation) indicate that the factual content of this textbook bears comparison with its longer established competitors.

The book owes much to Larry Weed with all 737 chapters arranged uniformly under the headings—criteria for diagnosis, clinical manifestations, plans (diagnostic, therapeutic and educational), follow-up and discussion. The latter includes the basic science, natural history, epidemiology and cost containment. It enables the reader to delve further into a topic beyond the information needed for everyday patient care. References are provided at the end of each chapter for further reading. Consideration of the economic consequences of what doctors do, does not generally feature in textbooks of medicine. It is, however, particularly timely and relevant to trends in the delivery of health care. The authors all hail from North America but this does not detract from the value of the book in this regard or others for readers in other parts of the world.

There is a lively mix in both the sections and the subsequent chapters of bodily systems and pathology and of specific diseases and presenting symptoms respectively. This enables the reader to use the book at different degrees of resolution of his patient’s clinical problem. The index seems satisfactory for cross reference, from say the chapter on breathlessness to those on the diseases in which it is found. Medicine for the Practicing Physician provides relevant practical information in a well organized manner and lives up to the title and aspirations of its editor-in-chief in the preface. It is warmly recommended.

B.I. Hoffbrand
Whittington Hospital,
London N19 5NF.


Genetic technology is developing so fast that it is difficult for someone outside the laboratory to keep informed, especially as it is often accompanied by language that is unfamiliar and arbitrary. This essentially practical book dispels the confusion. It is aimed at students and researchers, but its usefulness goes further than them. Within its 77 pages, it describes current DNA techniques and defines terms such as introns, exons, HTF islands, jumping libraries and zoo blotting. It does not explain how the term ‘restriction enzyme’ arose nor the structure of chromosomal or mitochondrial DNA, but it is reasonable to assume some knowledge on the part of the reader. There are clear accounts of techniques such as in situ hybridization, chromosome sorting, linkage analysis, polymerase chain reaction, and pulsed-field gel electrophoresis. The presentation is excellent, with at least one diagram on every page, and clinical examples. For instance, the authors summarise the methods used for detecting submicroscopic deletions in patients with Prader-Willi syndrome, and the sequence of events which led to the recognition of the DMD gene product. Accounts such as these are necessarily brief, but they serve as a useful introduction to the principles involved. There is no critical assessment of the relative values of the different techniques, but this is a minor criticism of a book which aims to be concise, clear and cheap. It will surely be a useful book for physicians, surgeons and general practitioners in addition to the students of medicine or genetics for whom it was intended.

Sarah Bunce
Clinical Geneticist
Birmingham Maternity Hospital
Birmingham B15 2TV


This book will be welcomed. It is edited by Barry McCormick whose own contribution to this field is outstanding and whose pre-eminence is well recognized. Dr McCormick has assembled a group of excellent contributors among whom are such names as John Bamford, Denzel Brooks and Philip Evans. They cover the field of paediatric audiology in the early years in great detail but also with a clear simplicity which will appeal to the many different specialists who have to deal with children in this age group. The initial chapters on epidemiology and is particularly valuable at a time when screening tests of every sort are continuously demanded by pressure groups. These groups, having won a government or health service commitment often disperse to other things leaving the details to those less interested or active. Too often the purpose of screening is little-understood and indeed the action required by the findings cannot be applied.

The book covers the more difficult technical aspects of audiology, such as electric response audiometry, oto-acoustic emissions and hearing aids with clarity, completeness and