Book Reviews


This book is the result of a meeting held under the auspices of the World Health Organisation in 1988. A limited multidisciplinary group of epidemiologists, clinicians, pathologists and virologists from several countries summarise the current knowledge on cervical cancer and human papillomavirus, and also attempt to outline future directions for research. The format of the book reflects the dual intention, beginning with a summary report of the conclusions and directions recommended for future research. Such an approach lends a bureaucratic touch to a generally competent and fair review of the work which has established papillomavirus as a potentially very important factor in cervical cancer and precancer.

The text and conclusions rightly emphasise the importance of soundly constructed case-control and follow-up studies and of the need for effective collaboration between epidemiologists, gynaecologists, genito-urinary physicians, cytopathologists, histopathologists, molecular biologists and immunologists to obtain proper understanding of the very complex relationships between the tissue changes leading to malignancy, the presence and role of human papillomavirus and other genetic and environmental factors. It is unfortunate that the text does not contribute so helpfully to the problem of the histological classification of cervical precancers and the relation of these to cytological findings. The currently most widely used morphological classification and grading systems, the CIN system and the concept of dyskaryosis are not adequately discussed, although these are generally used as standards for comparison with molecular hybridization results. Also in the year and a half it has taken to produce this book there have been major developments in the molecular biology of human papillomavirus: the extremely sensitive polymerase chain reaction, and the increased attention to the expression of papillomavirus infection and not just the presence of viral DNA.

This book will be of value to anybody who is wishing to begin work in the field of human papillomavirus and genital cancer. Most experts will find little new, although there are some good reviews. Its official style and somewhat uneven content limit its value to the general clinician or pathologist.

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Magnesium could be considered as the 'Cinderella' cation. It is rarely thought about and even more rarely measured. 'Magnesium in Health and Disease' contains the papers presented at the plenary sessions of the Fifth International Magnesium Symposium in Kyoto in 1988 and the quality of the papers is variable. Most authors emphasize that magnesium is the second most important intracellular cation and a paper on the important role of intracellular magnesium on the control of cardiac potassium channels is one of many which illustrates the importance of magnesium in vital cellular pathways. The topics covered include the role of magnesium in cellular biology, in cardiovascular disease, neuromuscular disease, endocrinology and nephrology. As a work on magnesium it would have been improved if each section had included an overview for the reader less acquainted with magnesium metabolism. It is, however, a useful up to date work containing chapters which provide useful new information and is a useful reference work on magnesium. Anyone reading this book cannot fail to be impressed by the importance of the hitherto ignored cation, magnesium.

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