Book Reviews

Human Papillomavirus and Cervical Cancer, edited by N. Munoz, F.X. Bosch and O.M. Jensen. IARC Scientific Publications No 94. Pp. xii + 155, illustrated. International Agency for Research on Cancer, Lyon 1989, £19.

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 emphasize 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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Long Term Complications of Therapy for Cancer in Childhood and Adolescence, Daniel M. Green. Pp. xvi + 171, illustrated. Macmillan Press, Basingstoke, Hampshire, 1989. £30.00.

This book has the now uncommon distinction of having been written by one author, a paediatrician at Roswell Park, USA. Its title is accurate. It will be of great value to

paediatric oncologists. One only has to read the long lists of figures and of tables to realise that Dr Green is keen on presenting facts and numbers. Most long term complications of cancer treatment are dose related; cure is no longer the only goal, quality of life is also important. Growth and development of children and adolescents are vulnerable. We can cause less harm by good planning and wise choice of doses, drugs and operations for radiation, chemotherapy and surgery.

There are useful summaries, and a final appendix on evaluation and risk factors. The eleven chapters group organ systems from nervous to gonads, with final sections on treatment-induced cancers, and on psycho-social complications – marriage, divorce and life-insurance.

This book is up to date and its only deficiencies are spinal cord damage, L'Hermite's syndrome and full myelopathy (perhaps not reported in children?), and the 'recall' phenomenon. There is no mention of the UNSCEAR, BEIR and other reports on radiation effects. However, I praise the book highly; its recommendations ought to be taught and practised by everyone treating cancer in children.

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Magnesium in Health and Disease (Fifth International Magnesium Symposium) August 8–12, 1988, Kyoto, Japan, edited by Y. Itokawa and J. Durlach. Pp. xx + 432, illustrated. John Libbey, London, Paris, 1989. £36.00.

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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