Book Reviews

Clinical Medicine, 2nd Edition, edited by Parveen J. Kumar and Michael L. Clark. Pp. xiii + 1110, illustrated. Bailliere Tindall, London, 1990. Paperback £19.95.

The first edition of Kumar and Clark was published only 3 years ago but it has rapidly become one of the most popular medical textbooks in the UK and many other countries. The cynic will argue that the reasons for this spectacular success must in part be because it costs much less than dinner for two at a reasonably smart restaurant. But that is not fair. Kumar and Clark has been adopted with such enthusiasm because it reflects the increasing emphasis of clinical teaching on the epidemiology and mechanisms of disease in addition to the immediate problem of the diagnosis and management. Increasingly on the wards one overhears one's colleagues on their teaching rounds speculating on the cellular and molecular basis of the patient's illness, largely because so many of our modern drugs have been developed with basic mechanisms in mind. Thus we have an undergraduate textbook which reflects the changing face of medicine. Clinical teachers 10 years ago would have complained that this text is too theoretical with insufficient emphasis on bedside medicine. Even today many final year examiners are genuinely concerned that the clinical skills of some of our students are inadequate particularly as most diagnostic and therapeutic decisions are made on the basis of the clinical history and examination. This book is, therefore, no substitute for the many excellent textbooks of clinical methods, as indeed it is no substitute for the major tomes like the *Oxford Textbook of Medicine*. It is, however, an important addition.

Inevitably as textbooks reach their later editions they become thicker and more daunting for the potential buyer, who may then opt for a thinner newer book and so the cycle goes on. I hope that the authors and editors will be careful to avoid this pitfall. One has to bear this problem in mind when criticising textbooks on the grounds of their omissions; I would have liked a little more epidemiology but then I would say that wouldn't I! One genuine minor complaint is that I found the hierarchy of typefaces in the headings and subheadings a little confusing.

Kumar and Clark is now a very popular textbook and it is the one I recommend to my students. The updating for this 2nd edition has been useful and each chapter has been reviewed critically rather than just tinkered with. The format and illustrations are excellent and the emphasis is sensible. What an improvement on some of the indigestible and disorganized 'major' textbooks of the past!

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The Courts and the Doctor, D.J. Gee and J.K. Mason. Pp. xxi + 217. Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, Tokyo, 1990. Hardback £14.95.

The authors are respected retired professors of forensic medicine, who, on their own admission, have no formal training in philosophy or the law, but have perceived the need for a text to help those doctors who find themselves faced with a court attendance. It is described as directed more towards the house officer in the coroner's court than the consultant neurosurgeon in the Courts of Justice.

The first three chapters are historical and descriptive of the English and Scottish legal systems. They provide a useful background for a doctor who might wish to know this. With chapter 4, 'the modern courtroom' the authors set about the task of providing a potential medical witness with the factual background of what he or she is likely to encounter in practice. The subsequent chapters are detailed, informative and accurate. Particularly important is chapter 8, on giving evidence. How refreshing to read, 'we would admit that going to court to give evidence is always an ordeal'. What the authors go on to tell their readers is how to make the ordeal more tolerable. 'Unpleasant experiences can be avoided by taking relatively simple precautions'. The approach is down to earth and practical, even to such details as knowing where the court is (some coroners courts are well tucked away) and arriving in good time. There may well be periods of inactivity known as waiting and the well-prepared medical witness is advised to take some work with him or her to occupy this time – exam scripts are suggested.

Much of what the authors have written is derived from their experience in different types of court but the advice is rather weighted toward the expert witness than the junior medical staff attending a coroner's court to provide a factual account of how the deceased came by his death. This becomes increasingly obvious as the chapters continue to 'some specific medico-legal situations (Chap. 9); failure of the expert witness (Chap. 10) – an extremely perceptive account clearly based on experience at first or second hand; Chapter 11, however, 'The doctor as defendant' is of more general application. In the section on the inquest and the fatal accident enquiry there is a reference to the 'faintly pejorative 'death due to misadventure'' in contrast to 'the neutral finding of accidental death'. For some coroners there is a real, if not always easy to define, difference and the Court of Appeal has upheld a jury finding of misadventure admittedly in a non-therapeutic context.

This is a very readable text brim-full of relevant and useful advice not found put altogether in this way in a single volume. Any doctor contemplating giving evidence would be well recommended to consult it before doing so.

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