

Book Reviews

Cellular and Molecular Immunology, A.K. Abbas, A.H. Lichtman and J.S. Pober. Pp. xi + 417. W.B. Saunders, Philadelphia, London, Toronto, Montreal, Sydney, Tokyo, 1991. Paperback £15.95.

Even if a recently published novel's portrayal of Harvard Medical School as a mixture of Lacedaemonian schooling and an intellectual commando course is likely to be hyperbolic, few would deny that what is good enough for their first year medical students is likely to be good enough for everyone else. Amazingly, the authors of this textbook of immunology have achieved a fresh approach to the subject which is not rendered superfluous by the plethora of ostensibly similar texts.

This is a rigorously disciplined book which uses molecular building blocks as the basis for describing structure and function. It is superbly illustrated with the right blend of figures and narrative. It passes the ultimate test for a book structured in this way; there are virtually no redundant, reduplicative, or unacceptably controversial figures or paragraphs. It is billed as an 'introductory textbook' used for 'first year medical students at Harvard Medical School'. There must be few practising immunologists, let alone other scientists or physicians, who would be confident of their mastery of its contents. It is highly recommended to those who want rigorous instruction in the science and application of immunology. It is not a book for those who prefer a diet of effortlessly assimilable pap. Scholarly readers who chose this sterner approach to the subject will be rewarded by first-class illustrations and a meticulously structured narrative at a very low price. They will also be reading an account which is far more up to date than most immunology texts said to be directed at readers more advanced than first year medical students.

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Differential Diagnosis in AIDS – A Colour Guide, J.M. Parkin and B.S. Peters. Pp. 159, illustrated. Wolfe Publishing, London, 1991. Paperback £10.00.

This is an exciting and challenging pocket-sized book. In the first half, 153 clinical or investigatory photographs are presented, background information provided and several questions asked. In the second half, the answers are given, along with much illuminating ancillary comment. Nearly all pictures are of high quality (including the X-rays!). A few of the fibre-optic pictures lack adequate definition.

The book describes itself, correctly, on the front cover as being 'a colour guide', although intelligent use of the index can allow this book to be used for rapid access to basic information. Those with experience of caring for AIDS patients will enjoy exercising their diagnostic skills

whereas those with only slight experience will discover their areas of ignorance and have them corrected *in private* (which of us likes our ignorance to be corrected in public?).

In summary, almost everyone will profit from reading this book: it is not a textbook, large sections of which have to be read at one sitting, but rather a book that can be usefully read from cover to cover in repeated spare moments.

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Health, Peter Aggleton. Pp. ix + 159, illustrated. Routledge, Chapman & Hall, London, 1990. Paperback £4.99.

This is a clearly written, straightforward text about sociological insights into health. The first step is to persuade the student that health is not a straightforward concept. For example, is it the absence of disease, or the old WHO definition (which exudes extrovert heartiness) or does it have to do with adjustment to one's physical and mental capabilities, or being able to realize one's potential? Perhaps all of these have their place in a rounded definition. The pity is that so often between medicine and sociology each seems to want to dismiss what the other has to offer, rather than enrich its own perceptions.

In that sense, this book does not succeed particularly well in transcending disciplinary boundaries and some medical readers will at times find it irritating. For example, they do not need epidemiology or dermatology defined – nor probably does anyone else who is likely to read the book. What the book does well, however, is to differentiate several distinct sociological schools of thought, almost as distinct from one another as each is from the biomedical. Thus, *social-positivist* explanations emphasize that health and disease are shaped by culture, class and environment, at least as surely as by genetics and viruses. *Interactionists*, on the other hand prefer to concentrate more on how people feel about their own health as a consequence of their interactions with other people. Without going overboard for interactionism, one can accept that it helps to explain whether people see themselves as 'mad' or 'aberrant' or 'handicapped'. Finally, there are the *structuralists*, who explain differences in health as the product of the whole structure of society. Marxism is probably the best known and most influential among the structuralist theories. Capitalism is then seen as the cause of social class differences in health, while health services (like everything else) are organized in the interests of the ruling class. Similarly feminism (as an alternative structuralist view) sees much ill-health among women as a result of male oppression.