

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.

It is a pity that these rival theories so often seem to claim a monopoly of the truth and to be mainly studied by their own particular faithful. Each has something to offer, particularly to the strait-laced medical reader, so long as the messages are expressed in ways that he or she can listen to them. I am not convinced this book meets that demanding requirement.

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The Management of Acute Pain, Gilbert Park and Barbara Fulton. Pp. 166. Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, Tokyo, 1991. Paperback £14.95.

It has taken 20 years to establish the management of chronic pain as worthy of clinical and financial resourcing; the spotlight has finally moved back to the care of patients with acute pain. The publication of this book is therefore extremely timely. It is a short, well-presented, clearly printed, indexed guide aimed at junior medical and nursing staff written by two anaesthetists.

In identifying reasons for inadequate acute pain relief, I felt that the organizational aspects of the provision of care deserved consideration. Co-ordinated leadership from senior medical and nursing staff, possibly crystallized in the form of protocols, may be the key factor in improving care which is often reactive and provided by overworked junior staff. This concept would have strengthened the problem-oriented approach espoused by the authors.

A more didactic approach in some sections would perhaps have given the book more personality. This was notably absent in the chapter on 'useful opioid analgesic drugs' where I would have welcomed some comment on the relative usefulness of each agent possibly in place of the illustration of their chemical structures. These qualms were partially offset by the inclusion of case histories in a separate chapter. Dosages of each drug are clearly given for adults and children but the preface rather disconcertingly states that this information must be checked with the BNF.

Every aspect of the subject from drugs to psychological factors and alternative therapies is covered, well organized under chapter headings, making the book a success in its aim to be a simple practical guide. It avoids the danger in a short book of being simply prescriptive by adequately imparting understanding of the principles involved. Excellent coverage is given to opioid infusions, patient-controlled analgesia systems and spinal opioids. Full details of technique and medical and nursing care are given, clearly based on practical experience. The list of further suggested reading was well constructed, quoting both standard texts and individual papers.

This book possesses the qualities of being practical, easy to read and relevant to virtually all medical and nursing staff. It should be made widely available on wards and in departments.

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NMR in Medicine and Biology – Structure Determination, Tomography, *In Vivo* Spectroscopy, K.H. Hausser and H.R. Kalbitzer. Pp. xv + 217, illustrated. Springer-Verlag, Heidelberg, 1991. Hardback DM 98.00.

The phenomenon of nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) is the common ground for chemists, biochemists, medical imagers, physiologists and clinicians. Not since the discovery of X-rays has there been such an upsurge of medical interest and activity centred on a new form of energy or, in this case, a combination of energies, namely radiofrequency and magnetism. A combination that induces energy release from proton spins acting as small magnets. This discovery has been known for half a century and used for chemical analysis for the last 40 years. At present magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) is the method of choice in neurology where available while magnetic spectroscopy (MRS) can record *in vivo* biochemical processes such as those occurring in muscle contraction.

Nuclear magnetic resonance is thus the most versatile of the energy forms used in medical diagnosis and probably the safest for 'non-destructive' testing. However, it is also the most complex to understand, manipulate and interpret, particularly when presented as algebraic formulae. Moreover, it could not have been developed without the mathematical operation of Fourier transformation of time-dependent signals into a frequency spectrum and modern computer technology.

This is not a book for light reading by clinicians, biochemists and radiologists but is well suited as an introduction to those intrigued by the fundamentals of physics and, in this sense, can be recommended without hesitation. It certainly reviews the uses of the present techniques including biochemistry, analysis of biological macromolecules, imaging *in vivo* spectroscopy and the fundamental principles of nuclear magnetic resonance in some detail. This book is invaluable as an overview of the physics of NMR and its applications.

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Obesity, Jean Vague. Pp. v + 153, illustrated. John Libbey, London, 1991. Paperback £17.50.

The author's outstanding contributions to research on the clinical and metabolic aspects of obesity over a 50 year period are included in this useful book. Professor Vague's accurate clinical descriptions in 1947 of two main types of obesity, namely 'android' affecting the upper part of the body, and 'gynoid' affecting the lower part, preceded our current understanding of the metabolic importance of android obesity and its association with diabetes, insulin resistance, and heart disease by many years.

The section on treatment, however, is sketchy; for instance the whole of the surgical approach to obesity is dismissed in seven lines, and the usefulness of this book is to the reader with specialist interests in the fields of metabolic aspects of obesity and to help him or her there is a very adequate subject index.

The section on dystrophic obesities contains some rarely seen conditions such as the Prader-Willi syndrome where obesity is associated with growth retardation and