Book Reviews

'Antibiotic Guidelines, edited by C.R. Kumana, P.Y. Chau and G. French. Pp. xii + 146, not illustrated. Science Press, Hong Kong, 1991, paperback.

This pocket-size book was originally written in the form of guidelines for medical staff in the Queen Mary Hospital, Hong Kong. The book is divided into three sections: firstly, a general introduction regarding antibiotic costs, dosages, drug interactions and antibiotic sensitivity; secondly, specific information regarding the different classes of antibiotics; and the final section relates to the specific use of antibiotics for certain clinical conditions, mainly in adults. The book is not meant to cover parasitic, viral or fungal infections and its contents are primarily aimed at treatment regimes for adults rather than children.

To a large extent this book succeeds in its aims. There are some problems in extrapolating the experience in Hong Kong to worldwide usage. This is probably most apparent in the first section of the book relating to the cost of antibiotic spending in hospitals and in the community because, as the author states, this will obviously depend on the source of financing these costs, for example, in Hong Kong, hospital care is largely provided by the Government, whereas in the community, patients themselves have to pay the costs of antibiotics. Antibiotic dosages are also summarized in a handy appendix and there are some useful practical tips regarding intravenous administration of drugs. Bacterial sensitivity testing is clearly explained and due emphasis is placed upon the geographical variations of this. There are some fascinating figures regarding worldwide differences in usage of, for example, chlorthalidol and aminoglycosides.

In the second part there is again a good balance of information. In the section on cephalosporins the rather hazy differences between the successive generations of cephalosporins are rightly emphasized. Critical comments regarding the usage of newer antibiotics such as imipenem and aztreonam are made. Occasionally there is some confusion generated in the text regarding the concept of tissue penetration which could be misread as being equivalent to intracellular penetration of antibiotics and this really needs more careful clarification.

Inevitably with a multi-author book, there is inconsistency, for example, regarding details of the possible dangers of certain antibiotic groups in pregnancy and in neonates. The book is also a little out of date in places; for instance, the section on quinolones fails to mention the improved activity of new quinolones against the pneumococcus. Chloramphenicol is stated to cause an unpredictable aplastic anaemia in approximately 1 in 25,000 patients, but later in the same chapter there is said to be 'high risk' of aplastic anaemia.

The chapter on the macrolides is rather short and not enough detail is given of the intracellular penetration of all macrolides, not just clindamycin. There is no mention of the newer macrolides such as clarithromycin or azalides such as azithromycin with their improved pharmacokinetics. The use of intravenous penicillin alone in a moderately ill patient with community acquired pneumonia is contentious and the need for cover against atypical organisms needs to be re-emphasized. There is no

mention of the value of nebulized colistin in cystic fibrosis. The section on septicaemia seems unduly short. However, there is an excellent section on tuberculosis; this is not surprising because Hong Kong has been one of the main centres of excellent TB drug trials and this section contains very detailed advice. However, some of the drug regimens are less appropriate in some countries, for instance, many western countries now use the regimen recommended by the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease. There is no mention of recent advances in the treatment of *Mycobacterium avium intracellulare*.

The section on chemoprophylaxis is a little unclear perhaps partly because of the difference in guidelines from the two sides of the Atlantic. The dangers of ethambutol toxicity in the eye are not stressed sufficiently and, despite the comments in the text, it is known that sometimes these side effects may be irreversible. The section on antibiotic prophylaxis contains an extremely short reference to selective decontamination of the digestive tract and this probably warrants a little more discussion. There is an excellent chapter on infective endocarditis.

At the end of the book, sections on dosage recommendations, adjustments on renal failure and drug interactions are generally good and there is a very useful bibliography.

Within the limitations of trying to advise suitable antibiotic therapy in areas of differing bacterial resistance patterns, I think this book succeeds admirably and it should be a very useful pocket guide for all clinicians involved in infectious diseases from the most junior to the most senior staff.

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Complementary Medicine Today – Practitioners and Patients, Ursula Sharma. Pp. x + 235, not illustrated. Routledge/Tavistock, London, New York, 1992. £35.00 hardback, £12.99 paperback.

Ursula Sharma writes as a sociologist and anthropologist, and whilst she looks at complementary medicine, she provides a fascinating insight into our medical behaviour. The initial chapters look at how people use and choose different medical practitioners. Her concept of 'informal health networks' transmit information about what health care is available through a sort of bush telegraph; it is fascinating. In a sense, her research allows us to get in touch with what is happening at a grass roots level. Her chapter on satisfaction and dissatisfaction provides illuminating insights into how patients perceive the balance between conventional and complementary medicine, along with the approaches and consultation techniques used by both groups of professionals. What is perhaps most fascinating about this text is a chapter on empowering the patient. Here it is quite clear from her research that people seeking help through complementary medicine are empowering themselves. By consulting a homoeopath or an acupuncturist, they are taking their

illness into their own hands and trying to control and deal with it rather than being told what to do by a medical practitioner. While this perception may be incorrect as far as many general practitioners are concerned, it is nevertheless an important consideration in the minds of the public. This book looks at the training and educational development of complementary practitioners and, in many ways, has little to add to the information available from other texts. The final chapter, however, on the politics of complementary medicine confronts the political problems that exist between conventional and complementary medical practitioners in a very illuminating manner.

Dr Sharma does not support complementary medicine unreservedly or as an act of faith, but rather wishes to look at the growth in complementary medicine as a way of defining how we respond and deal with our own health care needs. There are many lessons within this book for those wishing to plan health care provision. It analyses what people want and feel they need in order to help themselves. As a sociologist, it looks at complementary medicine as a study model, and demonstrates some fascinating points about how we analyse and utilize the medical provisions available to us.

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Brain Blood Flow in Neurology and Psychiatry, P.J. Ell and D.C. Costa. Pp. 183, 166 illustrations. Churchill Livingstone, London, 1991. £14.95, hardback.

This handbook is part of a series which aims to present the clinical utility of nuclear medicine to doctors in general medicine/surgery and specialized disciplines. The introductory four chapters quickly provide the uninitiated with the essentials of the radiotracer technique for imaging regional cerebral blood flow (rCBF) by single photon emission computerized tomography (SPET). The major chapter on rCBF SPET imaging in disease presents data on series of patients with migraine, Parkinson's disease, epilepsy, dementia, cerebrovascular disease and space occupying lesions.

Apart from being inconclusive regarding SPET's contribution to understanding pathophysiology, one is left with the impression that, although providing complementary imaging, the technique does not singly provide information that alters clinical decision-making. There is a suggestion that serial changes in rCBF SPET images parallel clinical changes in Alzheimer dementia, which may be of value in assessing response to various treatment regimes.

The last and longest chapter is a collection of 34 cases and, contrary to the preface, many of the scans are poorly labelled with right or left omitted. In an introductory book which includes basic clinical definitions, it is not unreasonable to expect arrows on the angiographic, CT, MRI, and especially SPET abnormalities.

The references are up to date but the typesetting is unusual and difficult to read.

The book is sponsored by Amersham who developed ^{99m}Tc-HMPAO (CERETEC™), the frequently mentioned radiotracer. The 24 lines on toxicity are dismissive, and although rats might survive 14,000 times the human

dose, the possibility of long-term toxicity in humans is not addressed.

A neurologist interested in the subject would probably seek a more comprehensive text, but to the non-specialized it is a readable and concise introduction to technology which hopefully will be more applicable in the future.

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ABC of Antenatal Care, G. Chamberlain. Pp. viii + 84, illustrated. BMJ, London, 1992. £9.95 UK, £12.00 overseas, paperback.

Good general practice is the heart of health care. The generalist must know something of everything – or if wise, where to find it. The general practitioner obstetrician will not be disappointed with this book.

The well-presented and illustrated text with crisp summary boxes covers normal and abnormal antenatal care in 16 readable chapters, though the A4 format is 'book-shelf unfriendly'. Traditional approaches are challenged: Is there a reason for each visit? Are unproven tests added to obsolete ones? Circulatory changes are well explained, as are tests of fetal wellbeing. There is common sense advice on medical disorders and symptom complexes, and a useful chapter on statistics.

A few grumbles. Any possible connection between CVB and limb defects is more likely to relate to gestation at testing than route. I would like to see the need for early ultrasound stressed in early pregnancy bleeding. The quoted recurrence rate for cardiac defects seems higher than current opinion, and does not stress the importance of family history. The serum iron arrow is upside down in the box for thalassaemia. 'Neonatal' for 'antenatal' appears on page 56. Bed rest, currently questioned, is perhaps overstressed for mild hypertension. In eclampsia reduced clotting is more likely than increased. Fundal height measurement (easy for GPs) is omitted in IUGR screening. Twin:twin transfusion is virtually unknown in dizygotic twin pregnancy.

These are small blemishes on a large canvas, and I would strongly recommend this book to GP obstetricians, vocational trainees and medical students.

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Recent Advances in Paediatrics 10, edited by T. David. Pp. viii + 246, 60 illustrations. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, London, Tokyo, Melbourne, New York, 1991. £22.50, paperback.

Tim David has once again brought together in one small volume a series of short articles covering many of the growing points in paediatrics. The subject matter is, with only the occasional exception, presented in a form easily absorbed and understood by the non-specialist. Particularly useful contributions cover hypoglycaemia, the management of HIV infection and severe asthma, extra