Book Reviews


Here is another book on diet and heart disease. One of countless dozens produced by different branches of the food industry, but this one sets off on a braver and more up-to-date scientific footing and is keen to be taken seriously. Much of the scientific material is up to date, derived from papers written by individuals who have, at least in the past, had academic positions. The book is presented in the format to be expected of a learned report with numbered paragraphs, comprehensive references and a logical index. The differences from a Government or WHO Report are provided by the technicolour cover and technicolour British Nutrition Foundation insert, producing a highly complicated if colourful ‘round table’ model for the dietary influence on heart disease. Thirty-one different dietary influences are included, some of them repeated as they affect ten physiological risk factors, to generate three aspects of coronary artery disease. The book ends with a brief paragraph assertion from the British Nutrition Foundation that its funding member companies are served by experts with integrity and reputation to assist in the concerns about nutritional problems resulting from diet and lifestyle. There will be those who view a ‘scientific’ publication from the British Nutrition Foundation with suspicion, but there is no doubt that this new book has indeed covered and adequately explained all the up-to-date concepts relating diet to heart disease. It is probably the only work available to achieve such a comprehensive and easily read account.

The analogy with the round table of Arthurian fame cannot go without comment! One remembers that the Arthurian knights were all knights errant and some of them were more errant than others. They all occupied a single seat of the same size. By the same token, this round table has accorded approximately equal space to all the different factors listed. Whilst this is considered necessary ‘for the sake of clarity and simplicity’ one might nowadays expect rather more comment on the relative importance of the different factors, either within individuals or within populations. Perhaps out of unwillingness to apportion blame, the dominant negative effect of high saturated fat intake is somewhat lost. However, out of fairness, the authors have given equal weighting to the influence of high intake from trans fatty acids, which of course almost uniquely derive from processed foods and whose purveyors are influential members of the British Nutrition Foundation. This mode of expressing the scientific processes behind heart disease does reflect the traditional wish of scientists to see their own province given equal weighting with everybody else’s, so perhaps this approach is in fact excusable.

An area where the authors have perhaps stood back a little from the prevailing 1990s view relates to the dietary advice for the general population. To say we should eat more fruit and vegetables is undoubtedly true, but health planners and health educationists now recognize that quantitative advice is necessary. Population surveys have shown that advice to eat more fruit and vegetables has permeated through every stratum of British society, indeed people now say they have taken that advice on board and increased their fruit and vegetable intakes. The problem is that they believe their intake to be satisfactory at levels which may be only a quarter of that which is recommended. Similar arguments apply to our intake of fat from dairy, meat and spreading fat products. The advice to use low fat options will only be effective if it is removed from the food chain which leads to human consumption.

Various points within this book are open to discussion or dispute. The assertion that the risk of coronary heart disease (CHD) cannot be predicted from a single risk factor must surely be wrong: risk factors are defined as predictors, whether causal or simply by association, of heart disease. The statement that when the majority of the population has high plasma cholesterol, other factors are possibly more important in determining risk is an unfortunate corruption of the correct observation that variance within that population is more likely be the result of other factors. The total risk of an individual is likely still to be dominated by plasma cholesterol concentration. In one or two places an opening sentence to a section which states the processes are not fully understood reads a little curiously. There is no biological process in the world which is fully understood, and one wonders why this should be applied particularly to the process of thrombogenesis, as one example. In this context it is good to see thrombogenesis and the influence of circulating fibrogen concentration discussed. Perhaps in future editions the fibrinolytic system, vasodilatation and vasoconstriction, and rheology might warrant a place. Alcohol gets a very positive showing in this book, suggesting (unreferenced) that it may inhibit enzymes in the coagulation cascade and promote fibrinolysis. The effects of dehydration following binge drinking is, however, not mentioned, nor that other old chestnut, the reduced cholesterol formation in patients with advanced liver disease.

From the perspective of a medical nutritionist, a section on dietary sources of different nutrients has certain opaqueness in that the amount in different foods is expressed as weight per 100 grams of food (in the same way as the equally opaque food labelling system adopted by MAFF and now required by EC regulations). In a scientific nutritional publication it would be more valuable to express the nutrient content of foods on a nutritional basis, which can related to the dietary recommendations for health. In other words saturated fat content should be expressed as a percentage of calories in the food. It is only on this basis that the relative nutritional qualities of different foods can be compared. Perhaps the most quotable quote from this entire book involves an untestable hypothesis: ‘Within one country, people who died from CHD ... do not generally eat more saturated fatty acids ... than those who do not die from CHD.’ Perhaps Dr Ashwell is proposing a graveyard study?

This is a beautifully produced book containing a wealth of up-to-date information. This reviewer is not enamoured with the ‘round table’, as in every other respect, not withstanding the academic quibbles dis-
cussed above, this book sets a new standard for clarity and will be of enormous value to health professionals, researchers, and a resource for planners. At £13.50 it is also good value.

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This is an excellent book. It contains 17 clearly written, authoritative, up-to-date chapters, each fully referenced. Dr Leslie has done a magnificent job as sole editor. The book is divided into two halves, the first dealing with insulin-dependent and the second with non-insulin-dependent diabetes. We live in an age when genes are seen by many as the cause even of such common diseases as diabetes, rather than simply providing the milieu in which environmental factors operate. The first chapter of each half of the book is thus devoted to candidate genes. There then follow chapters on epidemiology, family and twin studies, viruses, toxins, nutritional factors, thrifty genotypes, insulin-resistance syndrome and other risk factors. Each half of the book ends with a chapter entitled ‘Towards prevention’. It would be invidious to select any particular authors for special praise when they comprise such a feat of talent: K.G.M.M. Alberi, D.J.P. Barker, A.H. Barnett, P.J. Bingley, D.A. Cavan, E. Connor, J. Cook, G. Dahlquist, R.B. Elliot, A.M. Gale, G.A. Hitman, W.C. Knoler, J.E. Manson, M. Matsushima, E.J. Mayer, D.R. McCarce, M. McCarthy, N. McClaren, D.K. Nagi, B. Newman, K. O’Dea, Y.-H. Park, D.J. Pettitt, D.I.W. Phillips, J.Y. Selby, A. Spelsberg, N. Tajima, R. Turner, M. Walker, J.W. Yoon and P. Zimmet. This is an essential book for the library and for anyone with a serious interest in diabetes.

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Previous editions of the book entitled Clinical Bacteriology with the first-named single author must have been read or used by most, if not all of the senior medical and microbiologists in the UK today. It is pleasing to see the name of the book changed to Clinical Microbiology under three authorships in this edition. Many developments in clinical microbiology have occurred since the publication of the previous edition. Thus, most of the chapters have been thoroughly revised. Chapters on fungal infections and diagnostic parasitology are written by experts in respective fields, other than the three authors.

The book covers clinical practice, general procedures, culture, identification of common microbes, laboratory control of antibiotics, hospital epidemiology, media and techniques. At the end there is an appendix containing addresses of manufacturers and suppliers. This might be of additional benefit to some readers. There are just a few minor points to criticize. Authors failed to mention use of boric acid for transporting urine to laboratories from far away places. What is the purpose of addition of PABA routinely to blood culture media when there is very little use of sulphonamides? Why should CSF be inoculated into fastidious anaerobe broth? And is it still necessary to examine all throat swabs for Corynebacterium diphtheriae routinely in the UK?


It was a pleasure to read this new addition to the series based on lectures given at the Royal College of Surgeons of England. The book is clearly aimed at candidates for the current College Fellowship Examination and the spread of topics is admirably broad. There are two chapters on coronary disease and chapters to cover aspects of urology, biliary, paediatric and gynaecological surgery. The review of the treatment of surgery of the spleen in the tropics is interesting, clear and concise with a good summary of the evidence for post-splenectomy sepsis and splenic preservations. The references in this chapter were appropriate, although candidates would be well advised to read them.

More general topics were covered in chapters on venous access, management of acute pain and tumour immunology. There is good balance between scientific reviews and clinical descriptions, particularly pathology.

The book starts with a symposium on the applications of stents in biliary, urethral and coronary artery obstruction. This symposium is timely, but it is disappointing to see such a short discussion (six and a half lines) of self-expanding metal stents in the biliary chapter.

Perhaps if the editors had allowed more than 6 months since the appearance of the previous volume this aspect could have been dealt with more fully. The book is also thinner than its predecessors and one wonders if less haste could have produced more chapters.

The book is well illustrated but one section of this reviewer’s copy was printed faintly, which impaired the quality of the radiographic reproductions. However, this is a book which candidates for the Part II of the Fellowship Examination will certainly wish to read and Postgraduate Medical Centre libraries should add it to their sequence of earlier volumes.

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