

defence mechanism, rather than individually, is well described, as well as the differences between the various organ systems. The final chapter gives a particularly good description of the concept of the 'therapeutic window', while the penultimate chapter steers us through the epidemiological role of antioxidants in cancer and cardiovascular disease. From prematurity to ageing, and in virtually all important illnesses in between, the role of free radicals is very well described and referenced.

This book is one which I wholeheartedly recommend to anyone interested in modern medicine, and I shall certainly be keeping it within easy reach.

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Immunology

Annual review of immunology, vol 12, WE Paul, C Garrison Fathman, H Metzger, eds. pp 1093, illustrated. Annual Reviews, Palo Alto, California, 1994. £25.00, hardback

This volume is for the most part a compendium of immensely detailed and, for the selective reader, potentially invaluable information at a bargain price. If, as Francis Crick has recently pointed out, 'there is no form of prose more difficult to understand and more tedious to read than the average scientific paper', how much more true this is of even the best annual reviews. There is hardly anything in this book which one would actually read for pleasure but a noble exception is Polly Matzinger's essay on tolerance which is recommended even to Trust Hospital accountants. There are few contributions tailor-made for specific clinical specialists, though Bochner *et al*'s chapter on the immunology of asthma is immaculately authoritative. Most of the chapters deal with topics which will educate rather than instruct clinicians. Thus Pfeffer and Mak's exposition on transgenic technology is a window on the future for thinking doctors. Nor will any rheumatologist who blithely scribbles a request for 'anti-DNA antibodies' ever underestimate the awesome complexities of this subject after consulting Radic and Weigert's analysis of the genetics of anti-DNA antibody production. In short, this is an Olympian reference work for very selective reading.

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Medical procedures

Procedures in practice, NA Scott, ed. pp xii + 272, illustrated. British Medical Journal, London, 1994. £14.95, paperback

Mr Scott has put together a very useful small textbook which will fit nicely into the pocket of a white coat. Twenty-five of the most frequently undertaken procedures are discussed in appropriate depth by authors who obviously have wide experience of the techniques they are describing. These vary from straightforward ones such as basic cardiac life support with which all doctors should be familiar, to others which fall into more specialised areas such as peritoneal dialysis.

In general, all the procedures are well described and the illustrations are clear and to the point. Included in each chapter are sections outlining the indications for the procedure as well as details of the contra-indications, complications, etc.

Mr Scott does not suggest that merely by reading the book one can become adept at a procedure. However, this book will provide a great deal of help for young doctors who, in an emergency situation, may be faced with having to attempt an invasive, investigative/therapeutic procedure with which they are not entirely familiar.

Inevitably, people will regret the absence of descriptions of certain procedures and, as someone who works in emergency medicine, I should have liked to have seen sections on such things as intraosseous infusions, cut-downs, regional nerve blocks, diagnostic peritoneal lavage, etc. Unfortunately, however, there is no doubt that to be completely comprehensive Mr Scott would have needed to produce a book three times the size of the one which is presently available.

Mr Scott has made a very good selection and his book can be strongly recommended for all junior hospital doctors and many general practitioners. Certainly my copy has already been borrowed by members of the junior staff who have commended the accessibility of the information and its usefulness.

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Minimal access surgery

Minimal access general surgery, D Rosin, ed. pp 250, illustrated. Radcliffe Medical Press, Oxford, 1994. £45.00, hardback

This important book brings together contributions from eminent surgeons in England, Europe and the USA to produce a state of the art textbook for minimal access general surgery.

Each chapter is written by an established authority and deals with a different laparoscopic procedure. Although each contribution stands on its own, when taken together a rounded view of the subject is obtained. Laparoscopic appendicectomy is described in detail in two separate contributions but there is surprisingly little repetition in the book as a whole. It would have been interesting to have a longer section on laparoscopic colonic surgery and a chapter on the current state of instrumentation and its proposed development would be useful.

The exciting historical review and the chapter on laparoscopic hernia repair are perhaps the high spots of this comprehensive volume which is a cornerstone for those with an interest in this rapidly expanding specialty.

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Molecular biology of digestive disease

Molecular biology of digestive disease, P Quirke, ed. pp 128, illustrated. British Medical Journal, London, 1994. £12.95, paperback. ISBN 07279 0827 8

Molecular technology has expanded the horizons of all parts of medical practice in an extraordinary way during the 1980s and the revolution will continue. Gastroenterology has not been spared from these advances although clinical practice has been little affected so far. This is about to change and the purpose of this book is to acquaint clinical gastroenterologists with the science of molecular biology in relation to potential areas of gastroenterological interest. Dr Quirke and his authors, largely derived from Leeds, have concentrated on oncology, infection and genetics but Professor Williamson contributes a short piece on gene therapy at the end.

Does the book succeed in fulfilling its aims? I am not sure, but at least there are some useful contributions which should be of great help to a clinician trying hard to understand what all the new science is about. The chapter by Foster and Thomas on the hepatitis B virus and how mutants arise, and that on colorectal neoplasia by Scott and Quirke are excellent. Other chapters are uneven – either providing too much detail or being rather facile to the point of 'talking down' to the reader or, worse still, reading as if it were written for publication in a Sunday newspaper.

The major problem we all have with molecular biology is its language and concepts. To overcome this, a glossary of terms is provided and this is outstandingly good. My only comment would be that this should have introduced the book as a chapter on the techniques rather than just brief definitions.

To sum up, this book is well worth reading by anyone who is struggling to understand the contributions that molecular science is making to clinical gastroenterology. The best chapter will stimulate and inform such readers. Its brevity and cheapness are additional attributes.

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Neurological emergencies

Neurological emergencies, RAC Hughes, ed. pp viii + 359, illustrated. British Medical Journal, London, 1994. £19.95, paperback

Neurological emergencies is a compilation of 13 invited but peer reviewed articles that appeared in the *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery, and Psychiatry* in 1993. The first 12 topics cover the range of acute neurology: acute visual failure, cerebral infection, coma, stroke, tonic-clonic status epilepticus and neuromuscular respiratory paralysis are dealt with by neurologists; cord compression, subarachnoid haemorrhage, head injury and raised intracranial pressure by neurosurgeons, and acute confusional states and behavioural disturbances by psychiatrists. The final chapter, some would argue appropriately for a book on neurological emergencies, summarises the diagnosis of brainstem death.

Neurological emergencies are usually managed initially by non-neurologists and neurology is the major speciality where admitting general medical staff tend to feel least confident. This makes particularly welcome a book that gives guidance on the diagnosis and management of these common emergencies. Some chapters are better than others at giving appropriate and clear guidelines: the chapter on tonic-clonic status, for instance, goes through management step-by-step with strong recommendations and details, including drug doses. Contributions