Book reviews

Otolaryngology


I am afraid that I do not understand the purpose of this book, rather than wishing it to be as expected to fill. There are many large textbooks of otolaryngology, contents written by many authors; there are single author books on a single aspect and there are excellent little books for students and junior doctors. There is some advantage in presenting medicine from different points of view such as symptomatic rather than pathologic and I also remember with some pleasure going through French's index of differential diagnosis, so it was with interest and expectation that I opened Key topics in otolaryngology. There is no doubt that it is comprehensive in its coverage but why should the normal chapters of otorhinolaryngology be referred to as topics? Maybe it gives an exciting, if misleading, sense of urgency?

The cover states that 'the information is presented in a uniform systematic format ... an ideal reference source' and 'revision aid'. The topics are presented in alphabetical order which might have made it easier to look them up quickly except that we see 'acute sinusitis' at number 2 after 'acoustic neuroma' simply because 'acute' begins with 'a'. 'Chronic sinusitis' is at number 14, separated from its acute form by topics such as 'audit', 'cervical adenopathy' and 'caloric tests'. The complications for these conditions are way down the list as 'sinusitis – complications'.

On the other hand, the work put in by the authors cannot be praised too highly. The facts are up-to-date and well presented with a useful reference at the end of each section. What they say is all that is needed in a concise and clear manner. Readers will find it useful if they can overcome the format.

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Obesity


This book contains a selection of papers presented at the 5th European Congress on Obesity held in Ulm, Germany, in June 1993. The number of chapters reflects the growing European interest in obesity and the extensive research both in Europe and North America. One of the problems of a congress synopsis is the necessity for chapters to be somewhat condensed and abbreviated and the chapters in this publication are no exception. Indeed, many of the review chapters are distinguished simply by the lack of detail and absence of new research findings. Nevertheless, the volume contains 14 separate sections covering all aspects of obesity research and management. These sections range from the assessment of body composition, regulation of energy expenditure, adipocyte development and metabolism, the impact of visceral obesity, obesity and diabetes to aspects of treatment. No particular chapter stands out but many are of considerable interest for anyone interested in obesity – the single chapter on the genetics of obesity underlines the explosion of interest in this field subsequent to the Congress. All of the chapters make concentrated reading – this is a book to dip into and not one to read from cover to cover.

One must question the continuing need for books which summarise a selection of papers presented at a congress several months or, on occasions, years previously. The editors have done well by accomplishing the publication of this volume within 18 months but, nevertheless, many of the more innovative chapters have subsequently been published in greater detail in scientific journals. I suspect this book may prove useful for the enthusiast who requires knowledge of what was current in obesity in 1993 and it may well find its way on to the shelves of their departmental library.

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Minor surgery


A guide to minor surgery is written in a chatty style, reflecting the author's personal experience. 'Minor' reflects day-case surgical procedures and is not a reflection on case types.

Day-case surgery is a rapidly changing field. Many units are now open until 20.30 h, allowing for general anaesthetic procedures during afternoon operating lists. Pre-assessment clinics run by nursing staff who also carry out postoperative home visits, both aid a shorter hospital in-patient stay. Each unit will develop its own protocols which will not necessarily reflect Mr Schraibman's views. For example, preference is expressed for lignocaine as a local anaesthetic agent, while bupivacaine, because of its longer duration of action, is often used preferentially these days. Chromic catgut, linen and silk sutures are rapidly disappearing from the storeroom shelves, giving way to absorbable man-made materials.

Mr Schraibman does give some good tips, for example, the siting of groin scars when ligating varicose veins 'a glance at any holiday brochure will show that female swimwear is cut away in the groin and surgical crudeness will be highly visible'.

In summary, this book will certainly be useful to those working in Rochdale. It will be less useful to those elsewhere who need to be trained in their own consultant's preferences. No book can provide an adequate substitute for a surgical training which rotates around a number of different hospitals.

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