Book reviews

Atrial fibrillation

ABC of atrial fibrillation, GYH Lip, ed. pp viii+36, illustrated. BMJ Publishing Group, London, 1996. £10.95, paperback

This useful assembly of facts about atrial fibrillation draws welcome attention to a common and important clinical problem. Attractive presentation and format assist the reader. Key pieces of information are displayed in panels alongside the text.

The text would benefit from editing to eliminate repetition, condense the prose, remove minor errors and make the text and panels more consistent and specific. The illustrations are colourful but do not all correspond precisely to their legends. Recognition of irregular tachycardias, particularly sinus rhythm with extrasystoles and multifocal atrial tachycardia, both easily mistaken for atrial fibrillation, deserves more emphasis. The distinction between drug control of ventricular rate in persistent atrial fibrillation and drug prevention of paroxysmal atrial fibrillation needs to be kept clearer throughout the section on drugs and treatment. Although 10 years old, surgical treatment is still largely of experimental interest rather than of clinical value. It could, perhaps be replaced by discussion of catheter modification of the posterior aspect of the atrioventricular node for ventricular rate control. The use of beta blockade gets scant mention and there is no discussion of the influence, if any, of anti-arrhythmic pre-medication on the efficacy of DC cardioversion and subsequent maintenance of sinus rhythm. The anti-coagulant section is comprehensive and up to date, but the units of risk and incidence in the tables and histograms are confused. Economic factors are briefly mentioned but the cost effectiveness and benefit of prophylactic drug treatment, monitoring treatment, non-drug treatment and the consequences of stroke are not addressed.

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Ischaemia

Ischaemia: preconditioning and adaptation, MS Marber, DM Yellon. pp xv+236. Bros, Oxford, 1966. Hardback

There has been a considerable volume of scientific work on the subject of ischaemic preconditioning and adaptation and this has been well condensed into this eminently readable tone. The editors have gathered a group of contributors from principally the US and Europe, all of whom are experts in the field, and each of the chapters is an excellent overview of individual subjects, thus the wide appeal both to basic scientists working in the area and clinicians treating patients with ischaemic heart disease.

The chapters are well structured and the contents list designed so specific areas can be examined without delay, and there is a useful list of abbreviations for those not well versed in the vernacular of ischaemic preconditioning. Many chapters contain a useful conclusion or summary, and all are excellently

referenced with well-balanced references giving the reader a window into the scientific and clinical studies that have been carried out in relevant areas.

While there is clearly an emphasis on the relevant biochemistry, particularly in the first half of the book, the arguments are developed in such a way as to be easily understood by the clinical community and conversely, the clinical data towards the end of the book will still be of great relevance to basic scientists. From the clinician's point of view, there are particularly good chapters on preconditioning during revascularisation and in patients with angina, and on preconditioning as a protector against arrhythmogenesis.

While primarily intended for experimental and clinical cardiologists, this volume could find its way on to the shelves of most medical libraries and would be of interest to general physicians dealing with ischaemic patients also. The price, however, is a little high for individuals other than those with a specific interest in the area.

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Stroke

Stroke. A practical guide to management, CP Wardlaw *et al.* pp vii+66, illustrated. Blackwell Science Ltd, Oxford, 1996. £99.50, hardback

This book differs from most others on stroke as it is intended to be a practical guide to management. It is written by a group who are both eminent in the field of stroke research and experienced in the practical day-to-day management of stroke patients. Over the last few decades measures aimed at preventing stroke have progressed enormously and this book reviews all the important advances, both medical and surgical. It also highlights areas in which knowledge is deficient. As would be expected of a team led by the Edinburgh group, it is rigorous in its analysis of good and bad trials; the reader is left in no doubt as to what data are reliable (ie, evidence based) and what is perhaps 'fashion'. The text is easy to read and is aimed not only at doctors but also at therapists and nurses.

The book follows a logical order from diagnosis, type and site of stroke, pathogenesis, and treatment, to prevention of further attacks. It also includes a chapter on unusual causes of stroke, a detailed discussion about those aspects usually left to the physiotherapist and occupational therapist, and a section on the organisation of stroke services.

The authors will not be surprised that the reviewer disagrees with the statement that conventional angiography is still considered mandatory before carotid endarterectomy; Doppler duplex ultrasound and magnetic resonance angiography, in appropriate hands, are all that is needed in the work up for carotid endarterectomy.

The authors are to be forgiven for the fact that two CT scans are upside down; it seems almost churlish to mention this.

This book is a 'Which? Best Buy' for all those interested in the day-to-day care of

stroke. It is a clinical masterpiece and this reviewer will treasure his copy.

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Cancer

Cancer and the adolescent, P Selby, C Bailey, eds. pp xii+298, illustrated. BMJ Publishing Group, London, 1996. £29.95 paperback

Cancer services for children are generally well organised, most children being treated in Regional specialist paediatric oncology centres. Adolescents have been less well served, but there is now an increased awareness of their particular needs. This book follows from the First International Conference on Cancer and the Adolescent held in Leeds in 1994. The editors have brought together an international group of authors who have an interest in the interface between children and adults, covering a wide range of topics.

The initial useful section on epidemiology illustrates the lack of any consistent definition of adolescence. The age appears to vary from 10 years, surely too young, and 24 years, when patients are clearly adults. Information obtained from patients themselves suggests 13 to 19 years, but the age of admission to an adolescent facility should always be flexible and take into account the individual patient's wishes and needs.

The chapters on clinical features are well written and up to date; those on interacting with teenagers and the adolescent views of the impact of treatment are especially valuable. Information on the management of thyroid cancer, one of the commonest malignancies in adolescent girls, is strangely absent. The final chapter relates to the experiences of the Middlesex Hospital unit and should be read by anyone considering providing care for adolescents.

This book is to be recommended to all involved in the management of teenagers with cancer.

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Poikilothermia in man

Pathophysiological aspects and clinical implications, MA MacKenzie. pp 204, illustrated. Nijmegen University Press, Nijmegen, 1996. Paperback

This book is apparently based on a thesis, and consists of an introduction, a collection of papers and a summary in English and Dutch. It reports in detail studies on four patients who showed unusually labile body temperatures.

The reliability of the findings reported is often difficult to assess, since the small number of patients raises questions about the statistical comparisons with the four controls, and results for the controls are