Book reviews


This commendably brief book serves a number of useful purposes. It indicates the inheritance of many deformities and disorders of the musculoskeletal system and, particularly for the less common conditions, offers a succinct description aided by admirable line drawings of the main clinical and radiological features.

The 6 chapters of the book deal with generalized developmental diseases of the skeleton, from achondroplasia to rarities such as cartilage-hair hypoplasia and Jansen's metaphyseal dysostosis; malformation syndromes with or without chromosome anomalies; heritable diseases of joints, connective tissue, and muscle; and localized developmental disorders. This last chapter includes many of the common orthopaedic conditions such as congenital dislocation of the hip, club foot, and scoliosis, in which inheritance is a partial factor. The first chapter of the book forms an introduction to clinical genetics and the end of the book gives a tabulated list of heritable disorders and a list of genetic advisory centres.

The clinician faced with a difficult problem in diagnosis in generalized bone disease, or who requires information for the genetic counselling of parents, will find this book an invaluable aid. For those who require more detailed information, key references are given; but for the purposes for which this book was intended, the average clinician will find most of the immediate information that he needs to know without having to search for it in more extensive monographs and individual articles. Paediatricians and orthopaedic surgeons in training will also value the close-packed and useful information that it contains. This is not just a library reference book but one that should be available in every consulting room of those who are concerned with the diagnosis and management of deformities in childhood.


This compact book is a major landmark in the understanding of a disorder which affects about 3% of children. The author succinctly reviews the literature on febrile convulsions, but the most important part of the book describes the studies and conclusions of the Copenhagen group, of which the author is a member. She provides at least provisional answers for three questions of crucial importance to every paediatrician trying to understand and manage his many patients who have had febrile convulsions. First, what is the risk that a child who has had one convolution will have further ones? Answer: The risk is higher the younger the child, falling from 50% with a first convolution under 13 months to 15% when the first convolution occurs after age 3. Female sex and a positive family history increase the risk. Secondly, it is known from the work of Ounsted, Falconer, and others that prolonged febrile convulsions (lasting more than 30 minutes) can cause permanent brain damage with temporal lobe epilepsy, hemiplegia, mental retardation, or disturbed behaviour. What then is the risk of a febrile convolution being prolonged and severe? Answer: Again, the risk is higher the younger the child, falling from 29% under 13 months to 9% over 3 years. The risk is also greater for girls, and becomes greater the more previous convulsions there have been. Finally, what can be done to prevent febrile convulsions? Methods of reducing fever and of stopping prolonged convulsions are well known, but not always applied, as anyone realizes who works in a paediatric neurology unit and sees children who have been irreparably damaged by status epilepticus that could apparently have been prevented. There is an urgent need for the education of doctors in the danger and treatment of status in young children. But will prophylactic anticonvulsants prevent febrile convulsions? Answer: Phenytoin will not, nor will phenobarbitone given only at the time of fever. But phenobarbitone will if it is given regularly in doses adequate to achieve a blood level over 1-5 mg/100 ml (usually 5 mg/kg per day as a single daily dose).

There are several other items of interest in this book—for example the remarkable EEG changes often seen in these children—changes which nevertheless apparently do not help in assessing prognosis.

The work of Margaret Lennox-Buchthal and her colleagues is so important that others must surely repeat it to check the conclusions in another population. For example, it is a pity that the recommendation about phenobarbitone prophylaxis rests on a very small series of treated children. Meanwhile, the cliché is surely true that every paediatrician should read this book, or at least be aware of the author's conclusions, and should be grateful to her for these excellent studies presented so clearly and attractively.