
What a delightful surprise it was to find a copy of this book in my post, a gift from the editor. The only disadvantage was that I had to read all 800 pages in the summer’s heat before composing a review; I recall a quotation that reading a book before review served only to bias the reviewer. However, I have stuck to my task.

Since the first edition of this text, the molecular basis of endocrinology has matured and Charles Brook and his coauthors have tried to deal with its impact. This has been achieved by introducing completely new chapters which outline methodology and by modifying more standard areas of the text. This works very well and the result is readable, informative, and enjoyable.

A multiauthored textbook is inevitably a series of disconnected essays; this book is of two varieties, those with a traditional approach to clinical subjects, such as short stature and congenital adrenal hyperplasia, and those which deal with subjects with no immediate relevance to what you or I would do in the clinic. This heterogeneity enhances the book but could be disconcerting to non-specialist readers, who may simply wish to know what to do in a given clinical situation.

Although it resulted in a minor degree of repetition, it was a splendid decision to include five chapters on gastrointestinal endocrinology. I guess no two surgeons would ever agree in detail about operative technique, but there is surely a consensus that operations on children should be carried out only by those who have adequate diagnostic skills.

The highlighting of how important surgeons are to children with endocrine disorders, by including these chapters, must help protect children from those doing occasional operative procedures.

Another good decision was to include a chapter on neuroimaging and many illustrations of abdominal ultrasonography. But I would recommend that, however good the key to a figure, there should be a small line drawing to the side of a scan clearly demonstrating the features; what is glaringly obvious to the radiologist can look to me like a part of the lunar landscape.

It was hard work carrying it around in order to read it between patients. But it meant that I had the book available in clinic, and so occasionally I could have a look at it at the next outpatient or previous patient’s condition for enlightenment.

Despite the title, this is not a book which can or should be used as a practical guide or clinical handbook. It is an excellent reference work which can be used as a take-off point for further study. Each chapter is exceptionally well referenced, with Maguelone Forest winning a gold star for her chapter on adrenal deficiency for including the most references (n = 574!)

Charles Brook is to be congratulated on drawing together a tremendous international team who have produced a major text on paediatric endocrinology. I may occasionally disagree with some of the views of the editor but they are always expressed with simplicity and clarity. Charles Brook has had a major influence on the development of paediatric endocrinology in this country. The new edition of his book will undoubtedly continue to influence the study of paediatric endocrinology in other countries.

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There seems to be an inverse law of usefulness which applies to textbooks: the larger a book is, the less likely it is to leave the bookshelf. There are very few exceptions to this rule; Nelson Textbook of Pediatrics is one, but very few of them are about paediatric gastroenterology. The one book in this field that I can honestly claim to have used with unalloyed pleasure is John Walker-Smith’s medium sized monograph on diseases of the small intestine in childhood, so when I saw that he was editing this new book (235 pages) in Baillière’s Clinical Paediatrics series, my expectations rose.

The book consists of 11 chapters on some of the major topics of clinical paediatric gastroenterology; all are by experts in their fields, all but one from either the UK or the USA, the exception being Martin Stern from Tübingen. The multiauthour format has meant that the contents are variable, if they inevitably vary in style. Each chapter is independent of each other, with the basic science being included, and can be read in a reasonably short time.

The editors emphasise that this volume does not aim to compete with the standard textbooks of paediatric gastroenterology, but to select specific areas which would be of particular interest and relevance to practitioners who care for children and adolescents. Thus there are major omissions: while coeliac disease is discussed in the chapter by A D Philips and J A Walker-Smith entitled ‘The role of small bowel biopsy in diagnosis’, this important condition does not have a chapter to itself; similarly, while there is an excellent chapter on ‘Oral rehydration therapy and its underutilisation’ by Mamun Shahriar, there is no systematic section on infectious diarrhoeal disease.

If it does not claim to be a textbook, this little book contains much more useful guidance than many that claim to be textbooks. Nor is this a somewhat immodestly titled chapter ‘Optimal management of chronic constipation’ gives a beautifully clear exposition of a problem that blights the lives of many children, and E A Frucht and J A Walker-Smith’s ‘Recalling gastrointestinal oesophageal reflux’ gives similarly practical help, although UK readers may be surprised not to see any mention of alginate.

The casual browser who scans through the index of this book is likely to significantly underestimate its value, as several chapters have titles which give little clue to the gold nuggets contained therein. For example B S Kirscher’s contribution ‘Recognising inflammatory bowel disease’, is much more than a chapter on the diagnosis of these serious disorders, it contains a crisp review of their management, and is sufficiently up-to-date to mention the recently described association between perinuclear anti-neutrophil cytoplasmic antibody (p-ANCA) with ulcerative colitis and primary sclerosing cholangitis. Likewise Deirdre Kelly’s ‘The use of pretransplant liver transplantation goes far beyond ‘When to transplant the liver in childhood’.

J Timothy Boyle’s article on abdominal pain certainly deserved a less turgid title than ‘A task for the MRCP candidate’. It is a look at recurrent abdominal pain in children by subdivision of patients into symptomatic subgroups: simplifying the role of endoscopy in the diagnostic evaluation’.

Other topics well covered are gastrointestinal motility studies (Milla, food allergy (Stern), gastrointestinal bleeding (Zien and Perraull), and home parenteral nutrition (Bislet and Meadows).

If any general paediatrician wants a quick refresher course in paediatric gastroenterology, this collection of essays will do very nicely, and the MRCP candidate who has already read the appropriate section of one of the general textbooks of paediatrics will gain more per unit hour of reading from it than anything else I can call to mind. If it is not in the hospital library, £27.50 would be well spent on it.

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