Patients with sickle cell disease are more prone to infection than others, and any means of identifying those at greatest risk, such as those described by Dr Wilson, should prove of benefit.

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Medical ethics working group

Sir,

The Society for the Study of Medical Ethics has established a multi-disciplinary working group, with generous funding from the Leverhulme Trust, to study the ethics of clinical research investigations on children. The group has been meeting for 12 months, and hopes to publish its report at the end of this year.

Already a number of paediatricians have sent me interesting and useful examples of paediatric research that has rightly or wrongly caused ethical problems, and I am extremely grateful to them. The working group is still interested to hear of any paediatric research projects or innovative therapies which have caused ethical problems, whether to the researchers, to research ethics committees, or to others. Details will be treated in confidence and should be sent to me.

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Book reviews

The Immunology of Infant Feeding. Edited by A W Wilkinson. Pp 151: \$29.50 hardback. New York: Plenum Press, 1981.

Though a book of great interest, it should be recognised that *The Immunology of Infant Feeding* is more for those with special concern with childhood nutrition, infant feeding, or developmental immunology and allergy, than health care workers with a general paediatric interest.

The book presents papers given at an international conference in 1980, and it is useful in stating several position points related to this important and interesting subject. The field had advanced considerably during the 1970s, but was due for a review at this stage. It may be a disadvantage that both the experience and new observations reported came mainly from workers in the USA, the United Kingdom, and northern Europe rather than the wider world, where gastrointestinal immunity is more constantly challenged. Those contributing are acknowledged experts in their fields, and their contributions are logically arranged by the editor, who has achieved a satisfactory evenness of style.

The chapters are essentially derived from papers from the 13th course of the International School of Medical Sciences, which was held at Erice in 1980. They number 13, and each is followed by individual and modern bibliography, but no reported discussion. The initial papers are concerned with the functions of the IgA system and other protective mechanisms. The development of the themes concerned with IgA is particularly interesting and embraces the traffic of lymphoid cells and the possibility that antigen/IgA complexes may be 'tolerogenic'. This leads to the complementary chapter dealing with normal and abnormal food antigen handling in atopy, with interesting experimental results.

The sections dealing with the bacteriostatic effect of human milk present perhaps too narrow a view in the light of the fact that the position of lactoferrin has been to some extent stabilised. The very interesting early studies with this protein have not so far provided opportunities for clinical developments with therapeutic applications. The following chapter, concerned with the bacterial flora of the gut, and that concerned with virus infection, outline some of the

ecological features of the intestinal bacterial population.

The middle part of this informative book is devoted to some of the clinical patterns of the failure of immunity, especially in the context of malnutrition and in relation to low antibodies. The insights here represent the strong influence of Professor Soothill, who contributes one of the papers and the preface, and who has long been associated with allergy and immunodeficiency. These are important and fruitful contributions, however, which are of great theoretical interest.

The final chapters are unfortunately not so satisfactory in the context of the main theme of the work. Brian Wharton's excellent papers concerned with the nature and potential of modern artificial feeding preparation do not easily point the way through the problem of replacing the protective and immunologically useful factors to be found in breast milk. There remains no way of replacing this with a substitute based on the milk of another species, a position emphasised by Hansen's final chapter which refers to implications for immunisation and introduces the remarkable concept of the enterotheretic axis.

C B S WOOD