
The discovery of a treatment for phenylketonuria means that paediatrics can never be quite the same again. Every newborn baby must be regarded as a potential case and every backward child as perhaps treatable. The implications of this quiet revolution will be obvious and familiar to all who bear responsibility for the health of children: the details of this rare disorder may not be so well known. A new monograph appears at an opportune moment, therefore.

The book consists of contributions by a number of distinguished American and European workers. If there is little between its appropriately green covers that cannot be found by searching the literature, it fulfills a useful function in bringing together in truly authoritative fashion all that is known about the condition. It starts with the history of one of the great scientific discoveries of modern times, an exciting story that deserves to be better known. There are chapters on incidence and genetics, the clinical picture, the various aspects of pathology, management, the experimental approach with suggestions for further research and a comprehensive bibliography of 641 references in the world literature.

This book sets a high standard in presentation and production. If the reviewer focuses his main attention on the chapters on diets and management, it is because they are likely to be the preoccupation of paediatricians. The detailed diets and the recipes for making them palatable are particularly useful. There are tables to show the minute composition of the commercial phenylalanine-restricted preparations and the phenylalanine content of normal foods, the latter with some unfortunate omissions. The reader may be interested to know about Cornfetti, Cheezits and Sugar Smacks. He will search the list in vain, however, for chicken, turkey, duck or any kind of fish. Management is made to look a little too easy, as perhaps it is in the hands of Professor Bickel and Dr. Gruter. They refer to the hazards of treatment, but some elaboration here would improve the chapter.

In the section on Tests and Reagents, Dr. L. I. Woolf gives a careful review of the methods for determining the blood phenylalanine, the essential investigation in the assessment of the progress of a treated case. It is perhaps unfortunate that the serum amino-oxidase, probably now the most generally acceptable method, is mentioned in outline only. This sort of thing is inevitable in a monograph on an expanding subject. Clinical biochemists must be well accustomed to having to revise their methods and will not be particularly disappointed.

With these minor reservations, the book can be recommended to paediatricians, pathologists and dietitians.


Dr. McLaren has given us a well-documented and richly illustrated survey of this most important aspect of medicine, backed by a comprehensive bibliography, and indices for authors and subjects. Anyone who seeks to write authoritatively about malnutrition in relation to disorders of the eye and its adnexa, must devote many years to the clinical investigation of such disorders in various lands, but that is not all. His knowledge must be based upon sound anatomical, physiological and embryological studies. He must pursue numerous animal experiments and engage in intensive study of the enormous relevant literature.

In all these respects Dr. McLaren is well qualified to teach us, and he has made abundant use of his opportunities, always trying to steer clear of artificial simplification. He is well aware that controlled laboratory experiments, important though they assuredly are, will give rise to many a fallacy if their results are cited as interpretations of human disease. The great nutritional scourges of mankind are so often the outcome of multiple factors, nor is it always easy to assess the relative responsibility of nutritional and genetic factors in teratomatic lesions.

Dr. McLaren is to be congratulated for accomplishing so notable a task, and his book is delightfully easy to read. A second edition is likely to be called for within a few years, and its preparation will be an exciting task, because the implications of malnutrition upon the eye are so diverse and so swiftly changing.