Book reviews


The authors are to be congratulated on producing a textbook which comprehensively covers a rapidly growing subspecialty of paediatrics. It will be a most valuable reference work for all paediatricians, and should be accessible to paediatric gastroenterologists at all stages of their training.

The book is very well organized and consists of 3 main parts, common gastroenterologic symptoms and signs, disease entities and laboratory tests and nutritional care. The text is written with style and clarity, and the references are up-to-date and conveniently placed at the end of the appropriate section in each chapter. The instructive and beautifully reproduced illustrations each complement the text which refers to them. By and large, priority of space is given to the commoner problems, though more space might have been devoted to the chapter on diarrhoeal disorders.

In places the authors are somewhat didactic and make statements which would not receive universal agreement. For example, they state that the diagnosis of coeliac disease is essentially ruled out if steatorrhoea is excluded, and also incriminate emotional factors as well-described conditions leading to malabsorption. Similarly, the role of viruses in the pathogenesis of severe diarrhoea is not yet proven, yet viruses are listed as causing disturbances of intestinal function several times in the book. The third part of the book is particularly useful, and gives clear accounts of the different investigative techniques and tests which would be a necessary part of any paediatric gastroenterology unit. In the last chapter on nutritional care, the section on parenteral alimentation might have been more detailed so as to include, for example, the range of nutrient infusates which are now available outside the U.S.A.; as it stands it is of limited value to British paediatricians.

These comments are not intended as criticism of an excellent book, but are made rather in the hope that some modifications will be made in future editions.


Advances in Pediatrics has a firmly established reputation for well-considered but up-to-date scholarly reviews of paediatric subjects by experts. In the past some of these have been difficult reading for the non-specialist, but almost all have been reliable and comprehensive accounts of subjects in which advances have recently occurred.

The present volume maintains the tradition. For the general paediatrician the first chapter—genetic counselling, by Nitowsky and Legum—is probably the most useful. Packed with facts, many clearly displayed in tables which are easily comprehended and make useful reference sources, it is an admirable account of the theoretical and empirical bases upon which the best genetic counselling is built. Explanations of what is often a difficult subject to nonspecialists are clear and do not appear to the reviewer to be oversimplified.

In 69 pages there is hardly a word wasted, a welcome contrast to some woolly writings on the subject. A shorter chapter, on the effects of protein-calorie malnutrition on mental development, by Klein, Habicht, and Yarbrough, is an admirably critical review of animal and human data and shows how large is the scope for further carefully designed experiments and observations in this field. The contribution on advances in paediatric radiology by Grossman, Winchester, and Brill is workmanlike but inevitably disjointed, while those on juvenile diabetes by Kohman and Weil is, for those with a psychological bent, more satisfying to read. Two brief chapters, on the mechanisms of arthritis in children (Miller and Robertson) and on erythropoietin and red cell production (Dukes and Hammond) show the importance of cellular biology and immunology in paediatrics today, but were hard going in parts for this paediatrician. Most nonhaematologist paediatricians will benefit from reading the review of pyruvate kinase deficiency haemolytic anaemia by Van Eys and Garms, rare though the disorder is, if only to see another illustration of the complexity of some of the inborn errors of haematology. Nancy Esterly's chapter on recent advances in skin disease in childhood is brief, especially on therapy, but shows how scientific multidisciplinary studies are bringing understanding to several hitherto mysterious skin diseases. The chapter on mechanical ventilation in the newborn (Daily and Northway) is disappointing. In 11 pages there is a disproportionate amount of history and insufficient practical information.

The final contribution is a critical analysis of the clinical diagnosis, management, and prognosis of the hydrocephalic child by Raimondi. Written with the authority of experience, it gives a well-balanced and informative account of the present position without undue surgical bias.

The present volume maintains the high standard of its predecessors. General paediatricians will find particular justification for buying it in the first and last chapters.