Book reviews

Cardiovascular Risk Factors in Children: the Early Natural History of Atherosclerosis and Essential Hypertension. Edited by G S Berenson. (Pp. 453; illustrated + tables. £20.00 hardback.) Oxford University Press: New York. 1980.

Cholesterol, Children, and Heart Disease. An Analysis of Alternatives. By D M Berwick, S Cretin, and E B Keeler. (Pp. 399; illustrated + tables. £18.00 hardback.) Oxford University Press: New York. 1980.

When the first book arrived I saw that it contained a study and philosophy of such importance that a book review alone would have been an inadequate testimonial. The paper on page 412 stems from discussion of this topic and although much of what is said is more recent than the book, Dr Berenson's influence pervaded my thoughts.

This book is a 'must' for anyone interested in cardiovascular risk factors. It describes a community project in Bogalusa; to my shame I thought this was a place in South America but it is a small community in Louisiana. Each of the risk factors is reviewed and the authors have given facts about conditions in Bogalusa. Methodology is discussed, and if you want to know how to take the blood pressure and which instrument to use, this information is supplied in practical and succinct sections. There are recommendations for intervention where appropriate, and a wealth of background information is provided.

Most scientific monographs are tedious because there is so little joy in the authors but, in striking contrast, this book is fun to read; perhaps this is the reason why I found it so good. I highly recommend it.

The second book is academic rather than practical, and sets out to examine the cost effectiveness of programmes which might be used to lower cholesterol levels in the population. It assumes (and considerable evidence in favour of the proposition is assembled) that dietary cholesterol intake is directly linked to the incidence of heart disease, and four plans of action are discussed: (1) doing nothing, (2) screening all children and treating those with high

cholesterol levels, (3) screening a limited number of 'high risk' children and treating those with high levels, and (4) attempting to lower lipid levels through nationwide educational intervention without screening. The main limitation of this work is that consideration is confined to a single risk factor, whereas all the evidence suggests that the aggregation of risk factors is the important point.

The analytical methods are complicated and as a tiro in this field I have to accept that they are valid; this being so the median cost per year of life saved for each programme of intervention would be \$12 800, \$8604, and \$4450 for plans 2, 3, and 4 respectively. Assuming that for the last plan a wider-based programme about risk factors rather than just dietary information were given, it is hardly surprising that the authors should urge the US Federal Government to pursue population education. However, they also believe that targeted screening could be promising if it could be implemented for young adults rather than school-aged children because its cost would be within the compass of much smaller agencies.

This is a highly technical economic analysis of a type which I believe will be increasingly deployed as we face the reality of limited resources to meet infinite demand for health care. The important point is that preventive medicine is no cheap option: 'health costs money, whether we seek to cure disease or to prevent it.' I do not recommend this book for universal reading by general paediatricians, but I hope that departments of community medicine and medical advisers to government departments will consider its rather novel approach which must be important to us all as tax payers.

C G D BROOK

Diagnosis and Treatment of Immuno-deficiency Diseases. By G L Asherson and A D B Webster. (Pp. 390; illustrated + tables. £25.00 hardback.) Blackwell: Oxford. 1980.

The primary inherited deficiencies of the immune system have provided academic immunologists with human models for studying the interactions of T- and B-

lymphocytes. The diseases are rare, ranging from 1 in 500 in the population for selective IgA deficiency to more than 1 in 10 000 for severe combined immunodeficiency, but they are important for paediatricians because most of them present within the first few years of life, generally with severe and unusual infections, but sometimes with allergic or autoimmune disorders.

This book attempts to give the clinician and scientific background to these rare disorders. As such it is an excellent source of information and reference and there are many excellent chapters; the one on defects of purine salvage pathway enzymes is particularly good, and the account of hypogammaglobulinaemia in adults is excellent.

However, the title claims a wider function than just a detailed account of these rarest of diseases. Recurrent infections in children may be due to minor or to transient immune deficiency, or to both, particularly of the non-specific systems such as phagocyte, complement and opsonic function. These are eminently treatable conditions of major interest to the clinical doctor, yet because the defects are difficult to pigeon-hole into diseases with established pathogenesis they are almost totally excluded. In addition there is no mention of the widely adopted WHO classification of immune deficiency, nor is there mention of the way in which dietary factors, such as malnutrition or zinc deficiency, give rise to secondary defects of immune function.

The presenting symptoms of immune deficiency (that is infection) are common to many diseases, yet in their differential diagnosis there is omission for respiratory disease of such important contenders as cystic fibrosis and inhaled foreign body. In the treatment section there are glaring omissions; prevention—such as the role of breast feeding and immunisation—is not mentioned and even the sections covered are inadequate.

Neither author is a paediatrician, therefore it is unlikely that either has dealt with most of the conditions described. The expert could find this a good reference source but it is a one-sided account which cannot be recommended to the practising paediatrician.

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