Book reviews


This atlas covers every important aspect of renal pathology—such as, congenital malformations, infections, vascular disorders, interstitial nephritis, and the many varieties of glomerulonephritis—and is aimed at the diagnostic histopathologist (trained or in training) as well as the clinical nephrologist. It consists of 18 sections, each comprising a brief resume of the histopathological features together with some important clinical associations, and is illustrated by many colour plates including both gross specimens and photomicrographs.

The authors are well known for their contributions to knowledge of renal disease, and the factual content of this book is both accurate and up to date. The illustrations are generally well chosen, although there are 12 photomicrographs of Alport's syndrome and only 2 of the congenital nephrotic syndrome. The colour photomicrographs have reproduced well but, because their size is small much detail is lost especially in low-power views. The few electron micrographs are of poor quality and suffer even more from low magnification so that fine details, such as the basement membrane alterations characteristic of Alport's syndrome, are difficult to discern.

As the atlas demonstrates, the techniques used in the preparation of renal biopsy specimens differ appreciably from those used routinely for surgical and necropsy specimens. However, while the authors' own perfection is obvious, there is unfortunately, no mention of the technical difficulties which may be encountered, nor is there mention of the artefacts which can encourage the unwary to make erroneous diagnoses. Because of its limitations, an atlas such as this is not a substitute for personal tuition and experience, but if it were used as a form of illustrated lecture notes it would provide a useful back-up to more formal teaching.


The scope of this book covers the first year of life, but there are some references to later childhood; the authors do not indicate the readership for which it is intended. Some subjects are accorded extensive coverage as—for example, cardiac catheterisation from staffing to a detailed account of the technique, or the measurements of structures derived from M-mode echocardiography, or AV conduction measurements (His bundle). There are inconsistencies; for example, where reference is made to the scale of loudness of murmurs the definition given is insufficient to allow the reader to make use of the scale, and where reference is made to QRS and T axis measurements the reader is not shown how to make them. Some aspects of this book suggest that it might prove to be a vademecum for the paediatric cardiologist, but the general tenor indicates that it is more suitable for the general paediatrician who wants a firm grasp of paediatric cardiology, or for a paediatric cardiologist in training who needs a substantial summary of the subject.

In spite of the acknowledged importance of the cardiology of infancy, and especially of the newborn, to confine the scope of a work to this age group is to provide an artificial, awkward, and unsatisfactory presentation of congenital heart disease. A widely ranging bibliography is supplied but, as is inevitable with such a rapidly advancing and expanding subject, neither here nor in the text can all the most up-to-date views be represented. There are many illustrations, most of which are helpful; less so are some straight x-ray films of the thorax given to show variations in cardiac contour or altered pulmonary blood flow. The book contains a wealth of useful information and is clearly written, even where the best traditional units are used.

The author's intention is to give a background of normal physiology and laboratory evaluation before proceeding to the study of endocrine disease. These first two chapters are disappointing because they are unclear. The first on basic endocrinology is so compressed that the stream of facts, often with little explanation or discussion and with generally unhelpful diagrams, becomes at times distinctly indigestible. The second chapter, on laboratory evaluation of endocrine function is better, but in an area where many paediatricians have difficulty in knowing which tests to perform it is important to give concise instructions on the appropriate tests and their interpretation and this chapter fails to do this.

The rest of the book expresses the author's wealth of clinical experience, and the balance of the more common endocrine disorders against rarities is nicely held. Each chapter has a comprehensive and up-to-date list of key references.

Because of the format there is some repetition; this need not be a fault, although the layout causes problems when attempting to read about a particular topic which has a variety of presentations—for example, congenital adrenal hyperplasia. The major criticism is the tendency for facts to be presented without
adequate discussion which makes both reading and understanding difficult; this is particularly apparent in a chapter on abnormalities of sexual differentiation, but other chapters, where the endocrine problems are less complex, are more easily read.

These difficulties should not deter the interested reader, and for those who are prepared to read slowly and carefully all the information is available. With the present dearth of paediatric endocrine textbooks I would, despite the criticisms, recommend this book for the hospital library.

D C L SAVAGE


Dr Harper, Reader and Consultant in Medical Genetics at the Welsh National School of Medicine, set himself a formidable task when writing this book. He emphasises that it is intended primarily for clinicians in family practice and hospital specialties; and it is clear that he hopes to encourage more doctors to do their own genetic counselling.

To succeed the book must first persuade doctors that they can handle certain genetic problems which they would have previously either side-stepped or referred elsewhere; and secondly, it must provide enough accurate factual information to allow them to carry out the task properly. There is an ever present danger of succeeding with the first aim, but falling short on the second, and for this reason such a book must be judged by the most exacting standards.

Although I think it unlikely that any other clinical geneticist in Britain could have surpassed this work, I have some general reservations, and the few almost inevitable factual errors must be corrected in future editions. In the first 8 chapters all the general aspects of genetic counselling in Mendelian, non-Mendelian, and chromosomal disorders are covered. There is also a general account of prenatal diagnosis, carrier detection, and consanguinity, as well as of topics—such as non-paternity, and artificial insemination by donor. These chapters should encourage clinicians to tackle genetic problems, but it is doubtful whether this book alone could enable them to acquire some of the specialist skills—such as pedigree analysis in Duchenne muscular dystrophy—a view supported by the author’s hollow exhortation not to be faint-hearted because even some clinical geneticists get this calculation wrong!

The relaxed style of writing is full of practical hints derived from the author’s own considerable experience of genetic clinics, and this is where he has scored over the recent multi-author books on the subject from the USA.

The second half of the book covers individual diseases in a series of 15 short chapters on specific organ systems. The entries vary considerably in detail, usefulness, and accuracy, reflecting Dr Harper’s own areas of expertise. At this point one begins to wonder if a multi-author text might not be preferable, but I think that would be the wrong approach. It might be better to be more selective and include a little more detail rather than have a lot of disorders covered by only a few lines. Another problem for which there is no easy answer is whether lists of diseases, grouped under their usual type of inheritance, are useful. Some readers would be misled by the table ‘Mendelian disorders causing or frequently associated with mental retardation’. Neurofibromatosis and Duchenne muscular dystrophy are followed by the comment ‘not constant’, which might imply that mental retardation was constant in all the other disorders listed, which clearly it was not.

I think this will be a popular book and, on balance, it makes a positive contribution to genetic counselling. The greatest omission is a definition of which situations are generally best handled by a clinical geneticist or a specialist with a very great interest in the genetics of the disorder; without this I think the main effect will be to increase referrals to genetic clinics rather than to increase the genetic counselling in general clinics.

MARCUS PEMBREY


This book is of American multi-authorship with two main author/editors whose experience in dealing with every aspect of care of the developmentally disabled is clear throughout the text. Their main aim is to provide primary care medical and paramedical personnel with the skills necessary to screen, diagnose, evaluate, and develop treatment plans.

To date this is one of the best books in its field that I have read, and it is very suitable for doctors interested in developmental paediatrics. Research on both sides of the Atlantic is well represented and up to date although the testing procedures are inadequately described and, despite a good general chapter on intervention, discussion of exact management and critical evaluation of therapeutic interventions is missing. In general this book deals with single major disabling conditions; the severely multiply handicapped child presents particular assessment and therapeutic challenges.

Two of the most important questions that the primary care doctor has to answer are ‘Can he see?’, and ‘Can he hear?’ Well-evaluated methods of testing young children of different ages which are useful also for testing the mentally or physically handicapped child are inadequately described.

The first four chapters on ‘Children at risk of neuro-developmental disability’ and ‘Early assessment’ are particularly good. It would have been helpful in the chapter on ‘Hearing loss’ to have learnt about language acquisition in the deaf, how to encourage this, alternative communication, and additional problems—such as behaviour—as well as to learn of the influence on language and school learning of mild hearing loss due to catarrh, and how to test the hearing of children of different ages. Several scales for neurodevelopmental assessment are described and compared, but yet another format is described later without details about its evaluation. The differing aetiologies of different categories of mental retardation are not mentioned, and the role of disadvantaged social circumstances plus minor disabling conditions could have been stressed. The section on ‘Programme planning for the visually handicapped’ by Carol Donovan is helpful and practical, but the sections on ‘Therapeutic management with language and motor disabilities’ are less good and the primary care physician will learn little about what the physiotherapist actually does, or should do, or the work of the speech therapist in a language intervention programme, although the team approach to planned therapy is stressed. Medical assessment is also described at length in ‘Learning disabilities’ but the significance of the findings and critical evaluation of therapy is not clear.

These criticisms are those of omission, and they also indicate the gaps of current