Book reviews


This well produced, slim volume is largely the work of the ophthalmological group at the Cullen Institute at Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, Texas. While there are guest contributors from Israel and Japan, 11 of the 19 contributors come from Texas. This makes for some internal consistency in the book but leaves the reader with some concern that there is too much inbreeding and unified support for the spindle cell hypothesis, the efficacy of treatment with vitamin E, and surgical cryotherapy, all of which might not receive wholehearted support among other groups of experts from elsewhere in the world.

Despite the major contributors coming from the single centre in Houston, there is a rather disappointing lack of coherent editorial control, with unnecessary historical repetitions and chapters coming entirely out of any logical order.

The book falls into four sections: the three first chapters represent basic considerations, which occupy 12% of the book: a second section deals with mixed considerations from retinal development to medical legal reflections, occupying 23% of the book: a fairly intense third section on treatment with vitamin E makes up 16%; and a rambling, poorly edited, and over illustrated final section of the book deals with surgical approaches to retinopathy of prematurity, occupying the remaining 48%.

There are now so many publications on retinopathy of prematurity, and it remains a subject of such perennial importance in the care of the newborn infant that a text of this type is in many ways to be welcomed. Within it there are some brilliant pieces; to my mind the modest chapter on classification of retinopathy of prematurity by Kingdom from Florida is the high point of the text, making it crystal clear that with properly applied indirect ophthalmoscopy it is possible to describe the state of the premature retina in such a way that this could be agreed internationally, showing stages of abnormal vascular proliferation assigned to zones and quadrants of the retina in a quantitative fashion. This degree of precise classification should represent the essential currency of clinical trial reporting and honest brokerage in this difficult field, and I am not sure that other chapters in the book come up to the requisite standard.

A second excellent essay tucked away between animal models, efficacy of treatment with vitamin E, and toxicity of vitamin E is a short piece on the current state of the ethics of future experimentation in the field of treatment with vitamin E. This piece by Brody from Houston states the regrettably familiar position with marvellous clarity. In his view treatment with vitamin E has gone too far for further randomised controlled trials to be morally permissible. While he clearly regrets this position, he nevertheless carried me with him on two counts. Given the background knowledge and the outcome of the early studies there is an indication, falling short of proof, that there is some benefit and little risk attached to treatment with vitamin E. More convincingly, however, he argues that enrolment in a trial must depend on informed parental consent and that anyone offering parents a balanced set of information about the state of the current art would surely fail to recruit further subjects for any trial. He concludes that this is a classic conflict of interests between those of society in clarifying our state of knowledge and those of the individual patient seeking the best care available.

In the first half of the book there are a number of pieces that clearly represent the major motivation of the three editors in producing this book. It provides the forum to present their unifying hypothesis that all the strands in the retinopathy of prematurity story can be brought together if the condition is understood in terms of the vulnerability of the spindle cell to oxidative damage and the production of angiogenic factors. This hypothesis is richly illustrated and supported by morphological and immunocytochemical illustrations largely from the authors’ database of 97 pairs of premature baby eyes on which their thesis is based. Impressive as the work is, they lost a little support as far as I was concerned in adding a chapter on animal models and arguing that neither the baboon, puppy, or rat were suitable animal models because they did not have a spindle cell population of equivalent maturity to the human. Somehow this has a self fulfilling prophetic ring to it, and I would like to have seen critical sections from other centres to make sure that the ophthalmological fraternity as a whole would support this general viewpoint.

The vitamin E chapters suggest that the published works have now clarified the position of treatment with vitamin E and it goes so far as to set out a clear therapeutic schedule. On the other hand, at least in the section on biomedical ethics we are told that opposing views do exist from the research group in Los Angeles. The editors would have carried more conviction if they had invited a Los Angeles viewpoint into their midst.

By the time I reached the second half of the book I have to confess that my interest began to flag. The invited chapter from the Bailinson Hospital in Israel on cryotherapy in preventing severe visual handicap in low birthweight survivors was well written at least. The argument put forward is that the absence of blindness among the 942 low birthweight survivors argued the case for the efficacy of selective cryotherapy without the need for a control group. The authors were sufficiently convinced that they would consider it unacceptable to participate in a randomised control trial in the future. But what a pity this is, given the chance to take advantage in diabetic retinopathy of having two eyes in each patient with which to design the clinical trial. Given the precision of the early chapter on classification of the disease I wonder how the Bailinson group or the other surgical groups that contribute to the text defined their criteria for intervention in the first place. The other surgical chapters deal with techniques of surgery, including open sky vitrectomy, scleral buckling, cryotherapy, and photo-coagulation. There seems to be a general concordance that treatment is successful but by this stage in the book I was suspicious that the contributors had been selected to present a unified front.

The text is well printed and easy to read with large numbers of high quality drawings and black and white photographs. I found it a source of great disappointment.
that in some of the key early sections of the book there were no colour photographs of the retina in a subject that so perfectly and importantly lends itself to colour illustration. How frustrating to find then right at the back of the book a series of gorgeous coloured photographs tucked away as colour plates out of context.

This is a book for the library and not for the individual paediatrician. But, perhaps of greater importance, it might be taken as a challenge to British neonatal medicine and neonatal ophthalmology to define our own database and current state of good clinical practice in the prevention and management of retinopathy of prematurity.

DAVID BAUM


‘Recent advances in paediatrics’ is now in its eighth edition and Roy Meadow has again put together 15 chapters of topical interest to bring us up to date in various fields. As always, the reader will find more of interest in one chapter than another but on this occasion he will find most subjects of practical everyday importance, and there will be something new to be learnt in most.

The acquired immune deficiency syndrome starts off the book and Drs Jones and Watson give a comprehensive review of the subject up to the time the manuscript was written. The field is changing so rapidly that perhaps a short update should also be included in the next edition. The same applies to the third chapter on growth hormone deficiency, again a rapidly developing field where growth hormone is being considered for differing groups of patients. Professor Milner and Dr King have carefully reviewed their subject, although I feel that the section on anthropology was perhaps a little short compared with the amount of space related to biochemical tests.

The chapters on single dose treatment of urinary tract infection, neonatal jaundice, hearing screening in the newborn, near miss cot death, and idiopathic thrombocytopenic purpura were all excellent, with up to date information and practical advice. They should be read by all practising paediatricians. Those chapters on modern diagnostic imaging and Doppler echocardiography are fairly technical but an education on developing fields of paediatric practice. I also like the detective story of Indian childhood cirrhosis.

Child psychiatry is very much part of paediatrics and the two chapters on anorexia nervosa and child sexual abuse discuss these subjects in depth and are practical in approach.

The eighth edition of this book should be put on the working shelf next to the seventh edition.

P R BETTS


Connective tissue is a complex mixture of components, including collagen, elastin, proteoglycans, and various adhesive proteins such as laminin and fibronectin. Widely distributed in structures such as bones, arteries, tendons, basement membranes, skin, intestines, pleuropertitoneal lining, joint capsules, and cartilage, there is limitless opportunity for inborn inherited and acquired diseases. These can commonly present to paediatricians in children of all ages. Obvious examples include osteogenesis imperfecta, congenital arterial fragility, and various subgroups of epidermolysis bullosa.

The book authoritatively covers connective tissue biochemistry, histology, and electron microscopy, and clinical aspects include collagen fibril variations in Ehlers-Danlos syndrome and osteogenesis imperfecta, the molecular pathology of fibrotic diseases such as pulmonary fibrosis, and normal healing. Basic information on collagen protein structure and assembly, elastin and microfibular structure, organisation of basement membranes, and adhesive interactions are well covered and presented, but there is only scanty information on the molecular biology of collagen.

This is a work for basic scientists and researchers with a special interest in connective tissue structure rather than the practising clinician. Nevertheless, the relevance of basic science to clinical practice is very well illustrated by this book. The price and detailed basic science will probably limit this book to the libraries of academic physicians, rheumatologists, dermatologists, geneticists, and basic scientists interested in this rapidly expanding field.

F M POPE


The aim of treatment of childhood cancer is a healthy well adjusted adult. Unfortunately, the treatments used in malignant disease give rise to physical and psychosocial side effects, many occurring after treatment has finished. This book collects together the experience of several centres and discusses the late side effects that occur.

Chapters are divided into those dealing with dysfunction in organ systems and those concerned with the adverse effects seen in particular malignancies—for example, acute lymphoblastic leukaemia, Ewing’s sarcoma, etc. Second malignancies and problems encountered in the patients’ offspring are also covered.

There is much useful information contained in this book with many of the references relating to the 1980s. Psychosocial aspects are covered but not as fully as physical problems and the authors emphasise the need for further studies in this field. All the authors save one hail from North America. This is most noticeable in the chapter on the role of the nurse in late effect evaluation, and though some of the information will not be applicable in all countries, the chapter contains much sensible advice on monitoring the child and aiding and educating the family.

This book gives an interesting and useful overview of the problems that need to be considered in any child treated for malignant disease. It is reasonably priced at £15.

A ESSEX-CATER


Some books, like people, have more quality the more we know of them. Atlas of Skeletal Dysplasias is so: it feels good, it looks good, and it is good.

Assembled by a threesome of orthopaedic geneticist, paediatric radiologist, and orthopaedic surgeon, it is a collector’s catalogue of bone dysplasias from the cradle to the grave, arranged in order of the principal feature of the dysplasia.

The text is succinct and informative, the style granite, the result, an accessible bran tub with a few up to date references on