Book reviews

Rheumatoid arthritis: current trends in diagnostics, conservative treatment, and surgical reconstruction. Eds H Baumgartner, J Dvorak, D Grob, U Munzinger, B R Simmen. (Pp 284; DM 180.) Stuttgart, New York: Georg Thieme Verlag, 1995. ISBN 3-13-102441-0.

The publication of this hard-cover book was motivated by the opening of the "New Schulthess Clinic" in Zurich. It attempts to present a "state of the art" approach to the management of rheumatoid arthritis. To this end, the editors have invited contributions from no fewer than 36 authors spanning Europe and North America. The contents are divided into two main sections comprising 27 chapters. The first section deals with the diagnosis and non-surgical management of rheumatoid arthritis, while the second section refers specifically to reconstructions affecting the upper and lower extremities and the spine.

The section on conservative treatment opens with an interesting account of the development of rheumatology at the Schulthess Clinic, which addresses the various challenges and problems facing the rheumatologist. The personal approach taken by its author, Professor Gschwend, paves the way for the other authors, who share their personal experiences and opinions rather than solely providing a didactic account of the subject. In this regard, the contributions from Aeschlimann and Michel on the strategies and future trends in conservative treatment, and Ansell on the interdisciplinary approach to management, are particularly noteworthy. In contrast, the chapter on occupational therapy by Baumgartner and Slatosch is disappointing because of its heavy reliance on jargon and an overly complicated way of highlighting the importance of maintaining function and independence. The chapter by Fassbender entitled "Was Kauko Vainio right after all?" is confusing because at no stage was Kauko Vainio cited by name. The relevance of the title was deduced from the last reference of the chapter referring to an article on synovectomy by Vainio. This chapter, which attempts to present rheumatoid arthritis as a neoplastic disease, seems out of place.

The section on the lower extremity provides several excellent reviews of the staging and surgery of the lower limb. Morsher's article on the past, present, and future status of hip arthroplasty is instructive for its balanced critique of the different arthroplasty techniques available. Morsher highlights the biomechanical aspects of implants which may account for implant success or failure. Ranawat and Rodriguez provide an excellent review of knee arthroplasty in rheumatoid patients, which reflects their considerable experience in the discipline.

By concentrating on their own techniques, a valuable "How I do it" approach is presented which emphasises the pitfalls of surgery and makes other suggestions for a successful result. This chapter is well supported by that of Hamelynck on the subject of cruciate-retaining knee arthroplasty.

The section on the rheumatoid spine seems repetitive and the first three contributions referring to assessment, diagnosis, and reconstruction might have been combined without loss of information. Unfortunately, the problems associated with the rheumatoid spine are not as well considered as those dealing with other regions, and this probably reflects the complexity of the rheumatoid spine. Grob gives an excellent synopsis on surgical intervention in the cervical spine, where the indications and goals and principles of surgery are clearly enunciated.

The final section on reconstruction of the upper extremity fulfils the editors' aim of providing a "state of the art" collection of articles. This reflects the high frequency in which the upper limb is involved and the solid experience which all contributors have in common. The indications for surgery are thoroughly discussed and the dilemmas of deciding which joint to operate on first are clearly described. In this regard, the value of each author's opinions is underscored. The contributions by Souter on the staging of surgery, Gebber on surgery of the rheumatoid shoulder, and Simmen on the consequences of surgery of the wrist highlight the use of practical staging systems for guiding surgery. Gschwend's article on elbow arthroplasty and Swanson's on flexible implant resection arthroplasty of the metacarpophalangeal joints, two very difficult areas, are excellent descriptions of personal experience, which stress sound principles rather than providing a collage of anecdotes as is so often the case in such articles. Both authors highlight the problems encountered in the development of their expertise and the solutions by which many difficulties have been overcome.

This is a valuable guide to rheumatoid surgery because it brings together in a concise volume the experiences of leaders in the field. Its strength lies in the strong adherence to principles of management and how this relates to each anatomical area. Although it is not a reference text, it should provide residents and surgeons with a firm basis for understanding the pathology and management of rheumatoid arthritis.

Department of Orthopaedics,
St Vincent's Hospital,
Melbourne 3065 Victoria,
Australia

Peter Choong