Book reviews


Recognizing that uncritical bibliographical surveys are useless, Cobb essays an interpretative review of epidemiological data on rheumatic complaints and the principal individual diseases, rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis, ankylosing spondylitis, gout, Still's disease, and connective tissue disorders. Much valuable material is considered, and in a commendably brief presentation. However, it is regrettable that those leaders in the morbidity statistics, soft-tissue rheumatism and pain in the back, receive only scant mention.

The bibliography contains over 400 citations and appears to be reasonably exhaustive up to 1968, as well as including two from 1969. On the other hand a sixth of the references relate to 1951 or earlier. A number of the citations are not to published work, a few references appear to be quoted somewhat out of context, and the selection of others is at times perplexing. For instance, why rely on a 1924 Ministry of Health report? Sick-role, the individual’s response to illness, has changed appreciably since the NHS was introduced, and it is not as if later data from Great Britain were not available.

A great deal of work has been done on the epidemiology of rheumatism, but there is a dearth of testable hypotheses. A labour of synthesis should highlight the possible directions for future advance, and Cobb must be complimented for not shirking this obligation. One expects an author to indulge idiosyncratic views, but much of the evidence is conflicting and often unsubstantial, and unfortunately the end-result reads rather like a credo.

Particularly interesting are some of the juxtapositions of data from different sources, and the tables provide what is perhaps the most useful aspect of the book. But the work is far more than a presentation of data. Indulgence in conjecture can be stimulating and welcome, and every professional should read the book. However, a casual wanderer into the field of rheumatological epidemiology should tread with caution because the views expressed are often controversial. Thus Cobb argues that associations may be strong enough so that they can hardly be the result of Berkson’s fallacy; I know of no evidence to support this claim.

I think this book may have been published in the wrong context. Sidney Cobb is justly renowned for both his pioneer work and his thoughtfulness. To read the reflections of such a man is fascinating and instructive. But whether so speculative a work should be given the authoritative stamp of an APHA Vital Statistics monograph is another matter.

PHILIP H. N. WOOD


This is a short and very personal monograph attempting a difficult task to discuss in very general and broad terms difficult orthopaedic diagnoses. The difficulty lies not in the pathological or even physiological complexity of these diagnoses (which is not described) but in placing these in a proper logical differential diagnostic pattern. One can sense the authority and unique experience of the author in a clinical setting but in cold print the text does not achieve this.

There are several areas where further detail is required if this book is to have value for the postgraduate reader: e.g. ‘Dupuytren’s contracture’ of the plantar fascia usually arises in patients exhibiting chronic anti-inflammatory drug toxicity; spondylolisthesis is the most common cause of low back pain in children, etc.

The radiographic reproductions are good but on several pages are placed out of order to the text, e.g. under the heading Thoracic Outlet Syndrome there is a radiograph showing a dislocation of the clavicular bone.

I feel sure that those who have had the privilege of knowing or having worked with Dr. Cozen will have real pleasure in reading this text.

R. B. DUTHIE


This book is based on a course sponsored by the Postgraduate Board of the Royal Victoria Hospital and McGill University in Montreal and is edited by two of the orthopaedic surgeons of the Royal Victoria Hospital. It opens with a masterly summary by Morris Ziff of the changes occurring in rheumatoid synovitis which appear to be associated with an immunological response, and some minor speculation on how these arise. This is followed by an interesting chapter on the effect of synovectomy on the synovium and cartilage with particular attention being given to those observed in eight cases who had had a good clinical result.

After five chapters dealing with the knee, which include synovectomy, the management of flexion deformities, the use of the hemiarthroplasty prosthesis, a mould type of arthroplasty, and the hinge-joint of Waldivis, there is a useful short chapter by one of the editors on the selection of the surgical procedure to be employed. This could have been greatly enhanced by more references, particularly to techniques not described by the preceding authors, such as the double osteotomy of Benjamin and the hinge-arthroplasty of Shier, as well as by drawing attention to popliteal cysts and their complications.

The four chapters on the hip include an interesting suggestion that synovectomy should be considered in patients with known rheumatoid arthritis who have persistent hip pain without excessive bone erosion or narrowing of joint space, a competent review of mould arthroplasties, the types and techniques of total hip replacement, and excision arthroplasty in both rheumatoid arthritis and ankylosing spondylitis. Again there is a useful chapter on the selection of the procedure.
The management of the early and late stages of wrist and hand involvement are well described, with a long section by Alfred Swanson on the problem of joint reconstruction with silastic prostheses and the dynamic postoperative bracing required. This whole area could also have been made more comprehensive by references to other techniques which are employed elsewhere, and the same is true of the elbow where there is no mention of any type of arthroplasty. The one short chapter on the shoulder reflects the relative lack of interest in this joint until recently. The treatment of the rheumatoid foot is dealt with competently. The question of the place of synovectomy in the management of juveniles is discussed but on present evidence no firm conclusions have been reached.

One of the most outstanding chapters is that of Edward Simmonds on surgery of the spine. He not only discusses atlanto-axial subluxation but also describes with excellent operative details the surgical correction of flexion deformities of the lumbar and cervical spine in ankylosing spondylitis.

Despite the shortcomings indicated above, this book is well produced with good illustrations, and it should be of interest to all doctors, both physicians and surgeons, who are caring for patients with rheumatoid arthritis and ankylosing spondylitis.

B. M. ANSELL

Note

Second Rumanian National Conference of Rheumatology

Bucharest, May 17–18, 1973

The main theme of the conference will be 'Progress in Rheumatoid Arthritis', and there will be sections dealing particularly with epidemiology, pathogenesis, therapy, and surgery.

Intending participants should register before October 15, 1972, and enquiries should be addressed to The Secretariat of the National Conference of Rheumatology, Str. Progresului 8–10, Bucharest, Rumania.