Book reviews


This report outlines the topics reviewed at a workshop held in Manchester in 1979 whose aim was to develop and adopt nationally agreed objectives for undergraduate training in rheumatology. It follows a survey by questionnaire completed by rheumatology teachers from United Kingdom medical schools. A useful summary of their findings is given with the report.

The detailed chronological documentary style does not always make for easy reading, but it contains much useful information and highlights the various deficiencies. A study of case notes will frequently emphasise the continued lack of training in the examination and recording of abnormalities in the locomotor system. In the post-mortem room much valuable evidence from the joints and spine is often neglected.

The need for more academic appointments held by teachers who will have time to define objectives and evaluate results is stressed. Formal lectures to large groups have obvious limitations. Teaching of skill and attitudes as well as the imparting of knowledge is important, and the relevance of rehabilitation is best taught on individual patients. Students should not always be banished from business rounds, when the holistic and team approach can be seen to play a vital role. This report provides a useful blueprint for all who are planning changes in their curriculum, and existing programmes need to be kept continually under review.

E. B. D. HAMILTON


This is an interesting and well worthwhile collection of essays on problems which have stimulated the authors and appealed to the editor. His idea was 'to capture the spirit of good scientific meetings during the discussion of a formal presentation.'

In the first chapter Dr Philip Wood and his colleagues give a critical appraisal of medicine in the setting of a changing social structure. It certainly does this but from its title, 'Other waters flow,' onwards the message is clouded rather than elucidated by multitudinous mixed metaphors, verse, and adverbial superabundance. Dr Ralph F. Jacox in the second chapter provides a Heberden Round with a review of cases following several themes. Clinicians will find it interesting and informative. The editor joins the contributors with an excellent review of surgical procedures in rheumatoid arthritis, clearly separating the established generally accepted operations from the rest. Surgery of joint replacement, its present successes and problems, future hopes and prospects, are discussed by Professor V. Wright and Dr B. B. Seedhom of the Leeds Bioengineering Group. Dr H. F. H. Hill reminds us that it was only in 1973 that penicillamine was confirmed as able to modify rheumatoid arthritis by comparison with placebo, although in a dose now considered as too high. Selections of patients and selection of a dose regimen with an acceptable incidence of side effects are the theme of her writing. She has to confess she does not know the answer. As we still do not know how best to use gold after 50 years she should not be too disappointed. Genetics and environment in the HLA-related rheumatic disorders and the viral aetiology of rheumatoid arthritis are discussed in great detail by Dr A. Calin and Dr A. M. Denman respectively.

J. D. GOODE


How much should we tell our patients about the nature and consequences of their disease? This is of course an unanswered question, since it depends on so many variables. In life-threatening disease the physicians must weigh up the genuine desire and need for the patient to know, the wishes of relatives, and the probable effect on the patient of his considered prognosis.

Back pain, as Professor Jayson tells us in this book, affects most of us at some time in our lives and often tends to be a chronic and recurring affliction. Though not usually causing severe disability, it may lead the sufferer into an altered pattern of life. This then should surely be an indication for the patient to be told the nature of his disability and the limitations it may impose on his lifestyle, since, as is so often said, he will have to live with it. This book, it is said, is written for sufferers and others who are seeking readable, non-technical information on the back pain problem. Readable it certainly is, written in a pleasant fireside chat style and without condensation. The 11 chapters cover the anatomy and function of the spine, the effects of back disorders on society, mechanical inflammatory disorders, psychological problems, and the whole spectrum of treatments available, including such fringe aspects as osteopathy, chiropractice, and acupuncture. The lay reader may become a little lost when he struggles to understand the complexities of computerised axial tomography and the actions of endorphins and enkephalin, but nevertheless in the end he will have a reasonable understanding of his back problem. Hopefully he will also have a sneaking sympathy for his attending physician's failure to make a precise diagnosis, for, as Professor Jayson remarks, it is better to be honest to the patients and oneself and label the problem as 'non-specific back pain.'
I can thoroughly recommend this book for the more intelligent sufferer from back pain. Reading it will undoubtedly also help those of us who deal with the problem the better to communicate with our patients.

A. C. BOYLE


In the past 10 years diagnostic arthroscopy has become widely accepted and an essential investigation, particularly in the injured knee. The development of arthroscopic surgical techniques has proved to be difficult and sometimes exasperating, but the rewards in terms of rapid rehabilitation have been most gratifying.

This book is the most comprehensive text so far on the subject of arthroscopic surgery. It is clearly written in an easy-to-read style and extremely well illustrated. After a brief history of arthroscopy and arthroscopic surgery there is an excellent chapter on diagnostic arthroscopy, which includes practical advice on instruments and operative technique with good illustrations of some of the more common arthroscopic findings. Each illustration is accompanied by a line drawing to clarify the 'geography' of the photograph and a small diagram to show the position of the arthroscope at the time the photograph was taken. All the arthroscopic photographs in the book are accompanied by these line drawings and diagrams. They give the reader a clear understanding of the orientation which is so important in arthroscopy and set a new standard for clarity in text of this type.

The 4 chapters on arthroscopic surgery deal with the basic techniques, operations on the synovial membrane and capsule, operations on loose bodies, foreign bodies, joint surfaces, and ligaments. The major achievement of the book is the chapter on meniscal lesions, which describes clearly and illustrates dramatically how all meniscal tears can be dealt with by arthroscopic techniques. A simple system for learning arthroscopic surgery is described. A chapter on results and clinical experience is brief and might be better entitled 'The pros and cons of arthroscopic surgery.' There is an adequate index at the end of the Book.

This is an important book and represents the first comprehensive text on arthroscopic surgery. Reading it will not permit the skilled arthroscopist to become an arthroscopic surgeon overnight, but it should provide the inspiration to achieve that end.

A. J. HALL


This is the fourth volume of the series 'Practical Methods in Clinical Immunology' and deals with the commonest group of immunological diseases, those of the connective tissues. The book is divided into 2 distinct sections with about two-thirds of the text allocated to a discussion of the scientific basis and interpretation of laboratory tests in the various connective tissue diseases—rheumatoid arthritis, systemic lupus erythematosus, mixed connective tissue diseases, rheumatic fever, and the reactive arthritides and amyloid. There is also discussion of antigen-antibody complexes, plasma proteins, lymphocyte identification, and tests of cell-mediated immunity. The remaining third of the text gives detailed descriptions of the performance of the most commonly used of the laboratory tests in a clinical immunology laboratory specialising in the connective tissue diseases.

This is a most valuable short text derived from many years of experience by the authors with a clarity of style and conciseness of description that should leave the reader in no doubt of the value, interpretation, and performance of the tests described. The authors have successfully combined theoretical background material, presented with a commendable absence of indigestible detail, with a straightforward easy-to-follow description of the essential methodology. The book will be indispensable to clinical rheumatologists and associated laboratory staff. No medical library can afford not to have it available for postgraduate and other students of clinical medicine.

D. M. WEIR


As must be evident from recent reviews on other volumes in this series, 'Clinics in Rheumatic Diseases' holds a special place in the rheumatological literature. This volume must enhance what is already a particularly high reputation.

In his foreword the editor states that he has 'asked the contributors . . . to provide an overview of what is known about the physiology of the normal diarthrodial joint' and goes on to assert that he thinks 'the reader will be pleasantly surprised at how much we do know, but also at how much is really little more than speculation.' In my opinion both assertions are borne out; indeed the highlighting of the speculative aspect of what has commonly come to be regarded as fact is most refreshing. For example, in the beautifully illustrated opening chapter by Professor Ghadially on the structure and function of articular cartilage the well-publicised view that the surface of normal articular cartilage is ridged and undulate is challenged convincingly. Equally, the chapter by Drs Simkin and Nilson on trans-synovial exchange of large and small molecules details some of the difficulties of assessing the access of therapeutic agents to joint tissues and concludes with the clinically vital statement that 'Simplistic generalizations such as "all antibiotics get into all joints" are dangerous and may seriously compromise care.' Perhaps equally important in terms of clinical management is the chapter on joint temperature by Alistair Kennedy. The basis of clinical thermography in rheumatology is the assumption that the measurement of infrared radiation from