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Book review

Chondromalacia of the Patella. Eds J. C. Rickett and E. L. Radin. Pp. 156. £23.00. Williams and Wilkins: Maryland, Baltimore. 1983.

This book records the proceedings of a symposium held in June 1981. In their introduction the editors claim that 'the Symposium was a watershed'. For once there seems to be some justification for this claim. The printed record contains many superb articles, and the discussion chapters are gems.

The organisers managed to get together most of those who have made major contributions to the field in recent years. They also addressed fundamental questions, such as the meaning of the word chondromalacia and the relationship between pathology and symptoms. Excellent contributions on pathology and healing of the articular cartilage by George Meachim, John Goodfellow, and Rudolph Lempert are backed up by radiological, clinical, and biochemical contributions from Carroll Laurin, Ward Casscells, and David Hungerford respectively. The subsequent lively discussion led to several important conclusions. The group seemed to agree that the term 'chondromalacia' should be restricted to a description of soft cartilage, and that cartilage pathology has little or no relationship to symptoms. The

preferred clinical term was 'anterior knee pain', and many expressed the opinion that a search for articular cartilage pathology in this syndrome was worthless. The important issues of whether or not cartilage lesions progress (some do and some don't, it seems), and whether disease starts on the surface or within the cartilage, were also discussed.

The second half of the book addresses therapy of anterior knee pain. Elegant descriptions of operative procedures by Paul Ficat, John Install, and Paul Maquet are marred a little by a lack of evidence for objectivity or controlled analyses of results. Eric Radin makes a plea for accurate diagnoses of the many possible causes of anterior knee pain and for a conservative approach. The concluding discussion session tackled some practical issues, such as whether or not sporting activities should be recommended in young, symptomatic patients, and to what extent patients should be investigated. What emerges is a refreshing new look at an old problem and an unusual willingness on the part of the experts to discard traditional views and dogma.

Rheumatologists may not want to buy a copy, but make sure that your library or your orthopaedic colleague has one, and take a look before getting depressed by the next young patient with that non-existent disease—'chondromalacia'.

PAUL DIEPPE